

Teaching Practices from a Theoretical Perspective

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ABSTRACT Teaching practices are important for understanding and improving educational processes. They are closely linked to the teachers' strategies for coping with challenges in their daily professional life and to their general well-being, and they shape the learning environment and influence learner motivation and achievement. This paper aimed to investigate teaching practices for professional development from the post positivist paradigm and social practice theories. This view focuses on learners as active participants in the process of acquiring knowledge. Teachers holding this view emphasize on facilitating student inquiry, prefer to give students the chance to develop solutions to problems on their own, and allow students to play an active role in instructional activities. This paper assessed practices theory in terms of the extent to which it is able to describe and explain the phenomena of professional learning and practice. This paper demonstrates that positivism provides a potentially useful epistemological tool in the discourse of the teachers' professional development.

INTRODUCTION

The paper explores the notion of practice from a theoretical perspective and its importance in education. It begins with the concept itself and how it was conceptualized. The social and cultural practice theories are also presented. In the paper, the researchers further elaborate on the professional practice, teaching as a professional and social practice.

Theory and practice are not only related, but also essential to education and teacher practices as the best theory is informed by practice and the best practice should be grounded in theory.

Hamilton (2005) traces the word "practice" to German origin. The word can be described as "*Praxis*" and that, in a simplified English translation, can be represented by the word *doing*. This is a simplification because it signifies a verb form (*I do*) that, in English, has the complementary form, *I am doing*. This is known as the continuous form, and conveys a sense of continuity or process. Teaching as a continuous process is a practice.

In Polkinghorne's (2004: 6) terms, "practice" refers to "primarily engaged in action or activity", and "activity aimed at accomplishing a variety of tasks". Later, this practice is described as, "activity directed towards accomplishing a goal" (Polkinghorne 2004: 71). It is, according to Schwandt (2005: 319), the primacy of practice, and by the notion that prac-

tice can be conceived as itself a form of knowledge, or "knowing".

The term "practice" does not refer, primarily, to the sensuous objective activity of the individual but to the activity and the total experience of mankind in the course of historical development, for in instance, during the struggle of South Africans' freedom against the Apartheid Regime. In the context, content and performance, are all practical social activities. Because of what the world history, contemporary practice expresses people's infinitely varied relations with nature and with each other in material and cultural production, for example, Soviet Bolshevik Revolution, French Revolution and South African Revolution.

According to Warde (2004:17), a '*practice*'... is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another. For instance, forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their uses, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, and state of emotion and motivational knowledge. Reckwitz (2002: 249-250) ascribes to a *practice* as, "...forms of 'blocks' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements". He adds that a practice becomes a set of interconnected heterogeneous elements, and artifacts are included as elements in the constitution of practices. A further argument he provides is that "...carrying out a practice very often means using particular things in a certain way. It might sound trivial to stress that in order to play football we need a ball and goal posts as indispensable 'resources'" (2002: 253).

In brief, the point of departure is that people in their everyday life are engaged in practices. Practices are meaningful to people because they lead them to their destination in terms of what they have set themselves to achieve. Performing a practice usually requires using various tools and artifacts, such as equipment, materials, and infrastructures. However, this aspect does not make people conscious of the fact that they are consuming resources in their daily activities, even though they are. Primarily, people are practitioners who indirectly, through the performance of various practices, draw on resources (Røpke 2009).

Theories are useful tools that help us understand and explain the world around us. Theories suggest the way things are, not the way things ought to be. They are not inherently good or bad; however, they can be used for good or bad purposes. A prominent function of theory is providing an orientation base for reflection on practice. The process of applying theory to practice is mostly encouraged and valued in at least education. It remains however a relatively poorly understood process and continues to confuse both students and some practitioners in education.

Teacher Practice

As discussed, practice is the integration of ideas that link thinking with doing by people in contexts. Practice, from the introspective point in education is, therefore, teachers' behavior regarding educational matters, within and outside the classroom, based on theories that they consider valid which can give direction towards the achievement of set aims and objectives. Lindgren viewed practice in education, as well as in other fields, as based on theory (Lindgren 1957: 333). According to Fitzmaurice (2010: 18), this kind of practice focuses on methods and techniques, based on the qualities and disposition of the practitioner's (teachers') practice as a thoughtful, informed, responsible, state-of-the-art teaching in practice. Teaching, as a practice involves standards of excellence. To enter such practice is to accept the set standards and to be a judge based on performance and outcomes. Generally, participation takes place in communities of practice that portray a social group in which its members share given activities (Garcia et al. 2002).

Teachers, as described in the literature presented in this review, are all-in-one instructors, counselors, supervisors and managers, who are expected to translate homogeneous national curricula into individualized learning. This should be done in such a way that the curricula cater to the diverse needs of students in increasingly multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-leveled environments and be accountable for the success of these students on national assessment processes (Matras 2009).

Other authors see teaching as a complex, fluid activity that does not lend itself to an easy definition (Titus and Gremler 2010). Titus and Gremler (2010), however, feel that teaching consists of activities that transfer knowledge from instructors (teachers) to learners in a teaching-learning situation. Teachers as human beings are complex and, depending on their uniquely situated experiences and life in classrooms, they form their own principles, which influence and direct their practices.

Objective of the Study

To evaluate theories and values that underpin teaching practices in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

This paper reviews literature on teaching practices using practice theories that are based on post positivist paradigm. Insights about the limitations of positivism and modernity imply that one has to understand his or her own place in the world and what he or she is bringing to the research by way of assumptions about knowledge. Investigating one's own epistemologies and understanding how they affect oneself, as a researcher is an essential part of the post positivist approach. As part of this investigation, one comes to some understanding of how people construct and maintain perceptions of the world. Examining one's epistemology involves looking at the underlying assumptions we use to make sense of our day-to-day lives (Miller 2000).

The post positivist stance asserts the value of values, passion and politics in research. Research in this mode requires an ability to see the whole picture, to take a distanced view or an overview. But this kind of objectivity is different from just the facts lacking context, it does not

mean judging from nowhere (Eagleton 2003). It requires a fair degree of passion especially passion for justice and the ability to subject one's own assumptions to scrutiny. This requires patience, honesty, courage, persistence, imagination, sympathy and self-discipline alongside dialogue and debate.

Theoretical Framework

According to Postill (2010), the first generation of practice theorists sought a virtuous middle path between the excesses of methodological individualism (the claim that social phenomena must be explained by showing how they result from individual actions) and those of its logical opposite, methodological holism (the explanation of phenomena by means of structures or social wholes (Ryan 1970). Giddens as cited in Postill (2010) argues that we cannot separate 'individuals' from the day-to-day contexts they help to constitute.

Schatzki (2002) distinguishes four main types of practice theorists. These are philosophers (such as Wittgenstein, Dreyfus, or Taylor), social theorists (Bourdieu, Giddens), cultural theorists (Foucault) and theorists of science and technology (Latour, Rouse, Pickering). Focus here is on the theorists of the twentieth century (for example, Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1979; Giddens 1979, 1984) as they, according to Postill (2010) laid the foundations of what we now regard as practice theory. These are the social and cultural theorists.

Postill (2010) argues that in Bourdieu's theory of practice, the world's structural constraints form 'permanent dispositions'. Bourdieu borrows the Greek word 'hexis' to refer to the way in which social agents 'carry themselves' in the world, their gait (pace), gesture and postures (Jenkins 2002: 75).

It is important to understand what makes a social practice the particular practice it is because practices of the same kind differ at various times and places. Langford (1989) refers to a social practice as interaction between individuals. This depends on the circumstances in which each individual finds him/herself.

Bourdieu's formulation of practice involves action in time and space, along with intentions, meanings, values and understandings of the practitioner. He presupposes ideas about the nature and structure of the practice that is em-

bedded in the practitioner's understandings of the practice. Thus, the notion of *habitus*, as a historically and institutionally constituted set of predispositions to enter a setting able to be a 'player' in the kind of game for this setting (for example, a football field, or a government office) flexibly and openly. Also, with a 'practical sense' about what the setting might offer on this occasion (for example, opportunities to succeed or transgress), *habitus* can be defined as a system of dispositions (lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action). Crudely put, the *habitus* is the system of dispositions, which individuals have.

A closely related notion to Bourdieu's *habitus* is Michel Foucault's (1979) concept of 'discipline'. Like *habitus*, discipline 'is structure and power that have been impressed on the body forming permanent dispositions' (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001: 130). In contrast to Bourdieu, though, Foucault laid particular emphasis on the violence through which modern regimes impress their power (or 'biopower') on bodies (2001: 130).

Like Bourdieu, the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) first developed an original version of the practice theory in the 1970s, but he arrived there via a very different route. Where Bourdieu grounded his theories in empirical research, Giddens is more concerned with the history of philosophy and social theory than with sociological data (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001: 129).

Giddens' theory of structuration is that social practices become the site of the social (Giddens 2013). Thus, practices are the basic ontological units for analysis. This implies that individual actions are constituted by practices. Generally, social order, structures, and institutions come into being through practices. Social life, thus, consists of a wide range of practices, such as negotiation, cooking, banking, recreation, political, religious and educational practices (Schatzki 2002:70). This work contributes to the elaborate understanding of the constitution and change of practices.

Literature Review

Practices Specific to each Field

Practices are defined in different ways and in particular fields, and we can talk about practices in a particular field.

- ♦ Practice field – classroom teaching and teacher education
- ♦ Practice in the field – skills, knowledge, etc. (Kemis)
- ♦ Bernstein Field– who in the field has been talking about practices and research in the period of five years

At a later stage, Bourdieu added the notion of ‘field’ to practice-theoretical vocabulary (see Bourdieu 1992, 1993, 2005; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Swartz 1997; Reed-Danahay 2005). Fields are specialist domains of practice (for example, art, photography, sociology) with their own ‘logic’ that are constituted by a unique combination of species of capital, for example, financial capital, symbolic capital (prestige, renown) or social capital (‘connections’).

A field is, in the first instance, a structured space of positions, a *force field* that imposes its specific determinations upon all those who enter it. Thus, anyone who wants to succeed as a scientist has no choice but to acquire the minimal “scientific capital” required and to abide by the regulations enforced by the scientific milieu of that time and place.

In the second instance, a field is an arena of struggle through which agents and institutions seek to preserve or overturn the existing distribution of capital (manifested, in the scientific field, by the ranking of institutions, disciplines, theories, methods, topics, journals, or prizes). It is a *battlefield* wherein the bases of identity and hierarchy are endlessly disputed over. An apt metaphor for a field is that of a game. Only players with sufficient ‘know-how’ and belief in the game will be willing to invest time and effort in playing it. This has particular reference to the field of teaching, as teachers are the ones who know how to teach.

Bourdieu uses the concept of *field* as a structured social space with its own rules, schemes of domination, legitimate opinions and so on. Fields are relatively autonomous from the wider social structure (or space, in his terminology), in which people relate and struggle through a complex of connected social relations (both direct and indirect). The habitus must be seen not simply as a historically produced structure that functions to reproduce the social system that generated it, but as a set of schemes both imposed and imposing. It is in the interest of certain groups that a particular manner of doing, a specific standardized mode of achieving all the di-

verse tasks posed by social life, be considered as the only possible way of acting. The official representation of practice is an imposition of meaning, a continual enactment of symbolic violence that coercively, yet unobtrusively, channels how participants can construe the social world.

The patterned social forces that produced it structure habitus. It gives form and coherence to the various activities of an individual across the separate spheres of life. This is why Bourdieu defines it in various ways as, “the product of structure, producer of practice, and reproducer of structure,” the “unchosen principle of all choices,” or “the practice-unifying and practice-generating principle” that permits “regulated improvisation” and the “conductor-less orchestration” of conduct. Habitus is also a principle of both, *social continuity* and *discontinuity*. Continuity because it stores social forces into the individual organism and transports them across time and space, and discontinuity because it can be modified through the acquisition of new dispositions and because it can trigger innovation whenever it encounters a social setting discrepant with the setting from which it issues.

For Schatzki (2001: 3), ‘the social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings’. The maintenance of practices over time depends on ‘the successful inculcation of shared embodied know-how’ (2001: 3) as well as on their continued performance (Postill 2010).

The relationship between habitus and field is a two-way relationship. The field exists only insofar as social agents possess the dispositions and set of perceptual schemata that are necessary to constitute that field and imbue it with meaning. Concomitantly, by participating in the field, agents incorporate into their habitus the proper know-how that will allow them to constitute the field. Habitus manifests the structures of the field, and the field mediates between habitus and practice.

Teaching as a Social Practice

The main question here is, why do teachers think of being teachers in a particular way. D’Eon, Overgaard and Harding (2000) argue that teaching as a practice is a complex, intellectually demanding activity with five essential features—

1. Teaching is purposive (define practice)
2. Any large number of behaviors and activities may qualify as teaching,
3. Teaching is a rational enterprise and this is, in part, tied to its purposive nature,
4. Teaching is a communal, as opposed to an individual enterprise
5. The practice of teaching has a strong moral dimension

Teaching is Purposive: Teaching is necessarily a purposive activity. We must teach something to someone with a purpose in mind, which generally speaking is to get someone to learn something, to understand something, to do something, or to appreciate something, and so on.

Teaching Involves a Variety of Activities: A second essential feature of teaching is that teaching can involve a range of very different activities. The activities are limited to the extent that they must have potential to achieve the purposes of the practice, and they ought to be appropriate in the given context.

Teaching is a Rational Enterprise: Teachers ultimately ought to be able to justify their actions by providing relevant reasons for them in relation to purpose and context (Scheffler 1965). Rationality in teaching also means taking the context into consideration.

Teaching is a Communal Enterprise: Teaching as a practice in schools cannot be understood merely by examining the individual actions of a teacher engaged in the practice or the collective individual actions of some or all of the teachers.

Teaching has an Important Moral Dimension: Teaching in schools and in classrooms is a moral practice. Teachers have a role in developing the moral character of the learners consistent with ethical standards. Teachers are charged with the responsibility to both students and society for the training of the students and they have considerable authority in their roles. Teachers are able to develop the character of students available contextually, such as, develop character of social relations by improving appearance, for instance, how to be neatly dressed and speak politely, in order to be an example for students. Walker et al. (2013) assert that the academic progress of current character education should be adapted to ways of speaking politely.

To view teaching as a social practice is to acknowledge, first and foremost, the expectations society has for teaching, or in other words,

the particular purposes of teaching. Furthermore, the second feature of a social practice matches that aspect of teaching that involves common patterns of action or behavior, which are explaining, showing, questioning, justifying, judging, and correcting. The third feature of a social practice includes norms and standards, which are evident in the practice of teaching. In the course of the teachers' day-to-day teaching activities, they may not be able to explain why they act in certain ways.

How Teachers Understand Themselves as Teachers in a Social Practice of Teaching: Langford (1989) argues that it is necessary to look at the concept of a person and that of a social practice and understand the relation between them. This relation is internal and depends on each other for being what it is. The overall purpose shared by members has a tendency to shape a social practice and its existence and identity is entirely dependent on its members. Teachers must see themselves as teachers in a social practice of teaching.

Understanding what a teacher is depends on understanding the social practice of teaching and its purpose. In the South African context, the social practice of teaching is concerned with what teaching is and the forms of schooling that advance it (Morrow 2007). Morrow believes that the practice of teaching is the organization of systematic learning, which is the formal object of teaching and the role of the teacher. He claims that there are poor teaching practices because teachers do not understand what education is and further states that unless the concept of teaching is retrieved there are no hope of getting learning right.

Professional Practice

According to Green (2009), "professional practice" is in itself, of course, a construct linking two concepts. On the one hand, what might simply be seen as an adjective, a qualifying term "professional" contains with it the notion of "profession", and also that of "the professional", or of being or becoming "a professional".

Green (2009) argues that professional practice is complex. He explains *what it is*, or *what it is constituted as*, and *why and how it matters*. Professional practice is at the heart of all these concerns and questions, and yet this is something that is arguably still in need of clarification and

elaboration, as is indeed the concept of practice itself.

The term “professional experience” is often capitalized and mobilized as a replacement for “practicum”, in some circles at least. Here again, there is sometimes a certain overlap, with “professional experience” used to refer to engagement in pre-service practice of the profession at issue before being immersed in the “real world”, as it were. In teaching, this is the period when students are sent out on teaching practice (school-based experience).

There are at least four senses in which the term “professional practice” might be understood and operationalized. Firstly, it can be taken as referring to the notion of *practicing a profession*, as in the familiar expression “practicing medicine” or “practicing law”. Hence, one might similarly refer to “practicing education” or (perhaps better) “practicing teaching”, or “practicing nursing” and the likes, although these latter usages are admittedly awkward formulations, for reasons that perhaps bear some thinking about (think about characteristics of a profession, which are not part of this paper). Secondly, it could refer to the notion of practicing *professionalism*—that is, the fact that one enacts professionalism; one practicing what it is to *be* professional, or to be a professional. In this case, professionalism is itself is to be understood as a practice phenomenon, a matter therefore of practice and identity. Thirdly, and relatedly, it can be understood as referring to, or evoking, a *moral-ethical quality*: a distinctive quality of being in -the world, an attitude or disposition towards the objects of one’s practice, whether they be persons or not. Finally, a practice might be described as “professional”—in contrast, then, to what might be seen as the sphere of the “amateur”—analogously to what happens in sport and other arenas (example, dancing), where one is paid a fee for the service that one provides and enacts, often on an explicit, formally constructed scale. In this case, all of these senses might be seen as being relevant, to differing degrees. Professional practice fields are distributed across the private and public sectors. They feature various schemes of employment and remuneration and involve extensive programs of pre-service education and training (and in some case, renewal and reaccreditation). Moreover, all require a certain disposition to be instilled in their members, an appropriate pro-

fessional attitude regarding conduct and relationships (Green 2009).

With regard to practice itself, it might be useful to think in terms of three distinct but interrelated categories, namely, “activity”, “experience” and “context”. What is it that teachers do, what have they gained, how do they use their experience and make their activity relevant to the context.

Britzman (2003: 3) argues that the practice of teaching, because it is concocted from relations with others and occurs in structures that are not of one’s own making, but first and foremost, an uncertain experience that one must learn to interpret and make significant. It is pertinent to note that Britzman’s focus here is on initial teacher education, but her argument has bearing on thinking about professional practice more generally. This is because (professional) practice is undeniably experiential, at least part of the time, and perhaps different ways and senses. One “experiences” practice, one lives through it, aware that it is happening; one remembers it, afterwards; one looks forward to it, or not. It is an object of fear, of fantasy, and always of imagination.

Beck and Young (2005) speak of a particular form of “knowledge-based professionalism”, with closely links to more or less traditionally conceived university structures and cultures, and their concern ultimately is with questions of *knowledge*. They note accordingly, “the emergence of a new kind of professionalism with much weaker ties to the acquisition and production of knowledge in universities and much stronger links to practice in the “real world” (Beck and Young 2005: 192). There are two points to make here. The first is the emphatic counter-posing of “knowledge” to “practice”, which is symptomatic of what we would argue is an important problematic. The other is that such an argument, in postulating and critiquing a new phase in professionalism, obscures the manner in which for quite some time now there has been a more or less parallel emergence of distinctive fields of professional practice which differently engage this problematic. The relationship between knowledge and practice is indeed crucial, but it needs to be understood outside current, traditional frames of reference.

Schwandt (2005) provides guidance in this regard. He observes that the university sector is currently struggling with “how to frame teach-

ing, learning and inquiry in the professional practice fields”, which he describes usefully as “those organized human endeavors such as teaching, business management, public planning and administration, social work, counseling, nursing, allied-health endeavors, and so on” (Schwandt 2005:313). He contextualizes this struggle within new forms and intensities of managerialism, and also the rise into prominence of what is variously called “science-based” or “evidence-based” practice and policy.

Teachers’ professional practice is about teachers’ professional development, thus teachers’ learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students’ growth. Teacher professional learning is a complex process, which requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually, or collective capacity and willingness to examine where each one stands in terms of convictions and beliefs and the perusal and enactment of appropriate alternatives for improvement or change (Avalos 2010:12). As far as teachers’ professional practice is concern, they acquire and generated knowledge, and also disseminate the knowledge to the learners in and outside the classroom. This standard covers the requirements for reflecting critically on the teachers’ practice, establishing professional learning goals, planning and undertaking learning and development and participating in the extended professional community. Teachers’ professional practice are put into five categories that include- knowing the students level of understanding, the knowledge of content, planning, delivery, and assessment of instruction.

Teachers should understand what teaching (literacy and numeracy) is all about. In doing so, there is need to reclaim the concept of teaching. Morrow’s position is that in order to understand what teaching is, focus should be turned to the manner in which a teacher enables learners to learn.

DISCUSSION

The view that teachers have a moral obligation when teaching their students, gains support from various authors (Walker et al. 2013). A recent study conducted in Indonesia found that teachers have not managed to practice the concept of teaching character both conceptually and

contextually (Abu et al. 2014). Conceptual failure causes teachers not to embed character values that are extracted from the behavior of students. Contextually it causes teachers to fail in an attempt to develop character values, such as social relationships, honesty, and discipline. This observation corresponds with the findings by Arthur et al. (2014), which state that moral development of youth welfare cannot be viewed separately, but they must be intertwined with the community.

Building teachers’ competence for the practices that can help all students learn might depend on teachers’ experience of diversity, as much as on their knowing about the reasons for inequalities (Pantic 2014). Teachers can only achieve this by interacting with other colleagues in their communities of practice. This is in line with Langford (1989) who calls for a fresh look at the concept of a person and that of a social practice and understand the relation between them. Helping teachers understand the full transformative potential of their collective actions might require systematic preparation for building collaborative relationships with their peers and with other education professionals. Promoting systematic and critical reflection might involve collaborative enquiry and research into the impact of their own practices and environments (Pantic 2014).

On the other hand, professionalism education itself is undergoing development in many countries. Like all educational change, the process is slow or even difficult, and subject to many factors. There is the scarcity of data on what works in professionalism education and assessment. Since both hard outcomes and process data are sparse, it is especially challenging to interpret the current study’s observations as a function of the specific curricula at different universities (ABIM 2014).

As mentioned under literature review, some historians of education thought that control over the classroom is left to teachers in exchange for exclusion from policymaking. For instance, teachers were treated like industrial workers, even though with necessary skills, they were prevented from organizing for decades by explicit anti-union rulings, excluded from management, yet required to have credentials in order to implement policy. It is not surprising that teachers should not compare themselves to the idealized medicine-based model of liberal profession, by

virtue of which sociologists have declared them a semi-profession. Professionalism is their individual autonomy in the classroom, although superiors often refer to professionalism as the willingness to comply with directives from above, and call resistance, unprofessional (Larson 2014). The relation between the theoretical knowledge that researchers produce and teachers' practice appears uncertain to many teachers, who see university theory as thoroughly disconnected from the complex reality of the classroom (Larson 2014).

A self-reflective study conducted by Okas et al. (2014) enabled them to qualitatively analyze how teachers described and interpreted their teaching activities and what being a professional teacher means to them. The results show that when speaking about the image of a professional teacher, novice teachers stress technological teaching aspects, for instance, skills in using information and communication technology equipment. The essays by the experienced teachers included more keywords related to the development of students and stressed the teacher's role as an educator. Both novice and experienced teachers valued the pedagogical education of teachers.

Implications of Practice in the Classroom

First, teaching cannot be viewed as the transmission of knowledge from the enlightened to the unenlightened, rather teachers act as "guides on the side" who provide learners with favorable opportunities to learn.

Second, if learning is based on prior knowledge, then teachers must note that knowledge, and provide learning environments that exploit inconsistencies between learners' current understandings and the new experiences before them.

Teachers can also encourage group interactions, where the interplay among participants helps individual learners become explicit about their own understanding by comparing it to that of their peers.

Fourth, if new knowledge is actively built, and then time is needed to build it. Ample time facilitates learner reflection about new experiences, how those experiences line up against their understanding, and how an improved view of the world might be provided by different understandings.

A professional teacher today is required to demonstrate an increasingly large repertoire of personal as well as professional qualities, knowledge, skills and understandings. These qualities cannot easily be identified and developed by just one form of learning, for example, university-based learning or school-based learning.

For this reason, professional practice knowledge should be analyzed as representing more than individual qualities. Professional practice knowledge is dependent on the interactions among certain individuals, in a particular context and within a certain structure. It is formed by history and tradition and by the universal qualities that are embedded in the tradition of the profession. It is formed by the values that are held and realized by the professionals.

In the researchers' understanding, intentions and values are important aspects of practice. What takes place in a school or university is to some extent formed by the educators' visions of what should and could be achieved. From a historical perspective, the consequences of certain practices may be good or bad. History can facilitate as well as hamper certain practices.

Practice is always *contextualized*; it cannot be thought outside of some notion of "context". There are always, unavoidably, contextual considerations and challenges in understanding and research professional practice.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, practice and for that matter teacher professional practice need to be viewed in a broader perspective to include a theoretical underpinning and important aspects of practice, such as personal value and identity as well as a historical and traditional consideration. Thus, the conceptualization of the concept of practice needs to be always looked at in both, content and context. Theory and practice are related and each is essential to education and teacher practices, because the best theory is informed by practice and that the best practice is grounded in theory.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important that the theory and concepts of good teaching practice be communicated to administrators as well as teachers through on going, supportive professional development activities and literature.

University lecturers need to model these practices and provide supportive assistance to pre-service and in-service teachers as they grapple with these practices in their daily endeavors.

Issues and concerns of teachers, as they begin to make their transition to constructivist teaching, need to be acknowledged and addressed through discussions, explanations of what to expect, practical suggestions, reassurance, and supportive understanding of teachers' concerns.

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