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PLENARY SPEECHES

Theory and practice in language teacher education

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We often hear language teachers say 'Don't confuse me with theories, just give me practical ideas I can take into the classroom'. Many teacher educators and researchers, on the other hand, believe that (research-based) theory is more important, and should be used and implemented by practitioners. This paper will propose an approach to the use of theory and practice in teacher education that may help to resolve this dissonance. After some preliminary definitions and clarification of some common confusions, it is suggested that THEORY and PRACTICE in the context of language teaching are not polar opposites, but points on a continuum: any statement or guideline about teaching can be, more or less, practical or theoretical. The rest of the paper will focus on the questions how the various types of published theories or teacher theorizing can contribute to professional expertise, what is the place of practical tips or recipes, and how all these can be used or combined in teacher education courses to bring about optimal learning by novice teachers, or increased expertise on the part of the more experienced ones.

1. Preliminary definitions

PRACTICE, I will define as a real-time event or experience in the language classroom: for example, a game like 'Simon says', or a tip like 'Clean the board before you start the lesson'. THEORY can be defined as a generalization covering a number of such events or experiences, which may define, explain or predict them. Theories may be concepts such as language, play, modality, communication; or approaches such as the communicative approach; or hypotheses, such as Krashen's input hypothesis; or teachers' beliefs, such as a conviction that teacher talk should be minimized in the language classroom. (I will use the word TEACHER here to include both practising teachers and student or novice teachers in preparation courses.)

Writers on topics connected with professional expertise frequently talk about 'the gap between theory and practice'. If you search on the internet for the combination 'gap between theory and practice', you will get thousands of hits: the phenomenon is not confined to language teaching, or even general teaching, but is applied to all sorts of fields of professional activity: medicine, nursing, business, IT, public administration. Academics stress the value of published theories: these may be research-based but often are simply fashionable ones based on current thinking or speculation (Skela, 2017). The counter-complaint by practitioners is that the academics' ideas are impractical and that they have no idea what is going on in the real world of professional action. You commonly hear teachers say things like: 'Don't confuse me with theories, just give me practical ideas I can take into the classroom', or, after they have finished a course: 'The course was too theoretical; there was not enough practical guidance'. Methodologists, on the other hand, make statements like: 'Given a brief workshop or inservice, the most practical, most valuable information we can provide is a coherent view of how language is acquired, a theory of language acquisition' (Krashen, 1983, p. 261, quoted in Clarke, 1994, p. 12).

Underlying all this is an assumption that theory and practice are somehow opposed. But they are not. 'There is no opposition between theory and practice, and to set them up against one another is,

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wilfully or not wilfully, to misunderstand the nature of both' (Widdowson, 2003a, p. 5). They are arguably gradable, rather than polar, opposites that can also complement one another.

The basic theme of this paper is, then, the relationship between theory and practice in language teaching, and their use in teacher education. But before going further, I would like to attempt to clear up a few more misconceptions or confusions.

2. Clarifications

First, there is an underlying assumption that classroom teachers are atheoretical, and that theories are the domain of the researcher or methodologist (Clarke, 1994). This is a distortion of the truth. An important distinction here is that made by Henry Widdowson (personal communication, 9 December 2017) between teachers' theorizing, and formal theories published by academics in books and journals. Teachers theorize all the time; they could not function without doing so, though they may not make their theories explicit. Argyris and Schön (1974) make the now well-known distinction between 'espoused' theories (ones that teachers put into words and can tell you about) and 'theories in action' (ones which they may not be aware of, but which are revealed through their behaviour). A teacher who describes how she gives 'wait-time' before eliciting answers to questions, for example, has a clear idea of the thinking students need to do during classroom interaction with the teacher (Elizabeth Michaeldis, personal communication, 11 November 2017); ones who avoid using students' mother tongue in the classroom clearly theorize that such use is 'bad', whether or not they proclaim this belief explicitly.

Second, you find all over the place in the literature the phrases 'research and theory/theory and research' or 'research-based theory', as if the two concepts were somehow integrally allied in a confrontational relationship with practice. Sometimes it is even implied that they are actually synonymous. See, for example, the following quotation from the applied linguist, Rod Ellis: 'the alternative, then, is to consider how the divide between researchers and teachers, between theory and practice, can be bridged' (Ellis, 2010, p. 106). But of course research and theory are not the same thing at all. And by the way, note that Ellis is also by implication equating teachers with 'practice' the same way as he is equating researchers with 'theory', perpetuating the assumption that teachers are atheoretical – an assumption which I have already discussed earlier and, I hope, convinced you is without foundation.

Research is not only not the same thing as theory; it is not even the main source of theory, which may derive from virtually anywhere: observation, experience, intuition, a flash of inspiration – even a dream in the night. The point about theory is not where it comes from but what is done with it: how it is appraised and tested (Popper, 1963). So the connection between the two is simply that the primary function of empirical research is to support or refute hypotheses by providing convincing evidence. But note that it may also provide support for the use of practical techniques.

A third unwarranted assumption has to do with the implementation of theories. It seems to be a general, if not always articulated, claim that the published theories are 'right' and that they should be implemented by the practitioners: hence the hundreds of articles and books whose titles or subtitles include the phrase 'theory into practice'. An associated assumption is that the function of teacher preparation is to get teachers to learn these theories and then put them into practice in the classroom. This is based on the 'applied science' and 'technical rationality' approaches that were fiercely and convincingly attacked by Schön in *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) but are alive and kicking to this day, and frequently used as the basis for teacher preparation programmes. Following Widdowson (2003b), I would suggest that the major useful function of published theories for the professional is not that they should be implemented in practice, but rather that they provide insights, or useful ideas, or just things to think about. The practitioner may eventually adapt, adopt or reject the original theory: the important thing is the learning that results from critical reflection on it. 'The value of theory is not that it is persuasive but that it is provocative. You do not apply it, you appraise it. You use it as a catalyst for

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reflection on your own teaching circumstances, or, to change the metaphor, as a point of reference from which to take bearings on your own practice' (Widdowson, 2003b, p. 27).

Last, it seems to be generally accepted that the 'parent' discipline, or basis for theory that supports language teaching, is applied linguistics: specifically, the study of second language acquisition. This is true only up to a point. Applied linguistics can provide insights into processes of first and second language acquisition, such as Schmidt's (1990) NOTICING HYPOTHESIS, which has undeniable relevance for language teaching. But there is an enormous area of theory that is as important for language teachers as it is for teachers of other subjects that has nothing to do with applied linguistics, and everything to do with educational and pedagogical processes in general: theories about classroom interaction processes, for example; or the FLIPPED CLASSROOM model; or ACADEMIC LEARNING TIME (ALT), which I will come back to later.

Interim summary 1

The widespread assumption that there is an opposition between theory and practice is misleading: they are complementary rather than opposed. Classroom teachers are not atheoretical: they theorize constantly, though their theories may be tacit. Research and theory are not synonymous: research can test theories, but the theories themselves may derive from a variety of other sources. The major function of published theories for practitioners is not that they should be put into practice, but that they should trigger reflection and critical thinking which are likely to result in useful learning and professional development. Finally, theories that are useful for language teachers include, but are not confined to, those based on applied linguistics.

3. The relationship between theory and practice

If I ask teacher educators which of theory or practice should you focus on more in courses, they find it difficult to give a clear answer. The main reason is that even if you use the definitions provided at the beginning of this talk, the application to actual exponents in language teaching is far from clear. Task-based instruction, for example: is that theory or practice? Collaboration in the classroom: is that theory or practice? There are some constructs which are clearly theoretical: the input hypothesis, for example, or the concept of learning outcomes. There are others which are clearly practical: 'Break a piece of chalk before you use it to stop it squeaking on the board'; or the technique of dicto-gloss. But there are plenty of 'in-between' ideas: practical theories, or theories-in-practice, if you like. We can attempt to define a graded continuum as in the following section.

The list below moves from the very theoretical ('Generalized concepts and approaches') to the very practical ('Tips').

3.1 Generalized concepts and approaches

Examples of these would be LEARNER-CENTRED TEACHING; TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SKILLS; MOTIVATION; ASSESSMENT. Each covers a very wide range of real-world phenomena, and may be interpreted in different ways by different people. Their application to the classroom is indirect, depending on how you understand them and what kinds of behaviours or events you see as included in them.

3.2 Methods and models

These would include methods like TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION or AUDIOLINGUALISM, and learning models like SKILL THEORY. They have a more direct influence on choice of materials and procedures in the classroom: for example, the adoption of a skill theory model would imply the use of practice to achieve automatization of grammar; the adoption of task-based instruction would lead to the use of tasks that focus on fluent communication rather than accuracy.

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3.3 Rules, constructs and criteria

Rules include things like rules of grammar, spelling or punctuation, and help teachers provide students with generalizations or 'short cuts' to help them deal with a range of language events. Concepts like LEARNING OUTCOMES, or ACADEMIC LEARNING TIME are constructs which provide criteria for evaluation: in this case, evaluation of learning in a syllabus or activity. In both cases, the theory is clearly and directly applied to a set of real-world phenomena, and determine what is 'right' or 'wrong', 'valid' or 'invalid'.

3.4 Strategies

Strategies are things like ASSESSMENT TOOLS; MODES OF QUESTIONING; WAYS OF RAISING INTEREST. They provide the teacher with a range of options for classroom action, but without necessarily directing them which to choose. They are theoretical in that they cover a range of practical exponents; practical in that they refer directly to teacher behaviours or actions.

3.5 Guidelines

Examples of guidelines would be USE VISUAL MATERIALS; SPEND A LOT OF TIME TEACHING VOCABULARY. These relate to practical events, but do not define them very clearly: it is up to the teacher what he/she actually does in order to implement them. They do, however, push the teacher towards the use of certain types of specific procedures.

3.6 Procedures

Procedures include directives like HOW TO EXPLAIN THE PRESENT PERFECT; HOW TO USE A RECOMMENDED DIGITAL TOOL. They are more specific than guidelines, and leave little choice to the teacher; they have limited further application in helping the teacher about how to explain other grammatical items, for example, or use other digital tools.

3.7 Recipes

These are the kinds of things you find in teacher handbooks: games like 'SIMON SAYS', or how to run a DEBATE. They are very clear and explicit, probably what teachers mean when they say 'give us practical ideas'. But they are dead ends; once you have used them, that's it: they do not trigger further thought or give rise to more practical ideas.

3.8 Tips

Examples of these are CLEAN THE BOARD BEFORE YOU START THE LESSON; GIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR GROUP WORK BEFORE YOU PUT THE STUDENTS IN GROUPS, NOT AFTER. Such tips are useful as far as they go, but they are very limited in their application, not clearly rooted in an underlying rationale, do not allow for much thinking about implications or exceptions, and, like the recipes, do not generate further thought or teaching ideas.

Interim summary 2

Theory and practice in teaching are not 'polar' opposites. They are on a continuum: a teaching idea can be more or less theoretical/practical. The more theoretical you get, the more comprehensive and wide-ranging the implications, and therefore potentially the more influential the theory on teachers' thinking: on the other hand, such ideas may be too vague to be readily understood, discussed or reflected on, let alone implemented; and they may in many cases be open to widely varying interpretations. The more practical you get, the clearer the implication for classroom action, but the more limited the

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influence on teacher thinking: the most practical tips are even, in one sense, stultifying: preventing, rather than stimulating, thought and development.

4. Combining theory and practice in teacher education programmes

The next question to be asked is how to make optimal use of these various types of theory and practice within teacher education processes.

4.1 Experiential learning 1: Hands-on experience

To introduce this section, I would like you to consider the example of the classroom game of 'Hangman', often used by teachers as a way of reviewing vocabulary or, more specifically, the spelling of individual words. The teacher writes up on the board a series of dashes, each representing one letter of the target word.

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Students guess letters, at first randomly. A letter that is correctly guessed is written in its correct place on the dashes; a letter that is wrong is written up separately, and a line added to the drawing of a hanging man (or beetle, as I prefer (Ur, 2011)). If the teacher manages to complete the drawing before the students have successfully completed the word, he/she 'wins'; if the students fill in the letters first, they are the winners. As the letters are filled in, student guesses become more focused, and towards the end of the process the final two or three letters are filled in fairly fast.

Normally, the word is completed before the drawing: which is fine. But then consider: how much time was spent on the whole process? In my experience, the time is usually between 50 and 90 seconds. Let's be optimistic and say 50. But here is the punchline: HOW MUCH OF THAT TIME WERE THE STUDENTS IN FACT ENGAGING WITH – I.E. REVIEWING OR LEARNING – THE SPELLING OF THE TARGET WORD?

The answer, of course, is about two seconds. Possibly three or four? In any case, if you work it out, 10% of the time at most (usually much less) is actually spent learning something (reviewing the target item). The rest of it is spent randomly calling out names of letters which presumably the students in most cases do not need to practise. 'Hangman' is a waste of time from the point of view of learning: it provides for only minimal LEARNING OUTCOMES and ALT.

At this point you can see where I am heading. The activity, played in a session with a class of teachers, serves to illustrate and clarify the important theoretical concepts of learning outcomes, and ALT.

A more positive learning experience that illustrates the same concepts is the activity called RECALL AND SHARE. The teacher writes up or displays on the board a set of ten or so words that need reviewing: irregular past tenses, for example, or words that are frequently misspelt like *because, people, although, existence*. The students are asked to look at them and try to 'photograph' them in their minds, because in a moment, they will not be able to see them and will be asked to recall them from memory. After about 20 seconds, the words are deleted or hidden, and students are challenged to write down as many as they can remember. When they have written all they can, they are asked to share: they read out what they have to neighbours, and help each other to expand their lists. Finally, the original words are revealed or written up again for checking.

A critical discussion of this activity relating to learning outcomes and ALT reveals that it is much better: there are ten target words rather than one, and the whole time is used to engage with them: reading them, then writing, then saying and hearing them in pairs/groups, and finally reading them again to check the ones that had been forgotten.

This is one way teacher education courses can help teachers understand and apply useful theoretical concepts. From now on, they can check out any procedure suggested by a textbook or recalled from their own learning in terms of the theoretical concepts we have defined: does it in fact produce good learning, relative to the time invested? What can I do to improve learning and prevent waste of time

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on, for example, pointless 'busy' work, or an inordinate amount of time spent puzzling out or searching?

This could, of course, have been done the other way round, though perhaps with less dramatic impact! The target concepts could have been introduced first and then students invited to discuss how it applies to these two activities. The point is the cycle of action and reflection, which is discussed in more detail in the second example below.

4.2 Experiential learning 2: Vicarious experience

When I was a relatively inexperienced teacher, I came up against the problem of how to get my students to talk to each other in English, without lapsing into silences or using mother tongue all the time. I was working with a fairly advanced group, and began with the theoretical assumption that in order to get students to talk it is necessary and sufficient to suggest an interesting topic for discussion. I brought them what I thought was an interesting issue: the problem of conflict between teenagers and parents when the parents are over-dominating, and the children want more freedom. But the discussion never really got off the ground. At first I thought maybe it was because the subject was too abstract, and tried to make it more concrete by bringing the students a specific case study to talk about. It was a bit better, but the discussion still petered out fairly quickly. I then hit on the idea of getting them actually to do something about the problem: restated the case study as a letter from the teenager to an advice column of a magazine asking for help with her problems with her parents, divided the class into groups and told them they were the editorial committee of the magazine charged with composing a helpful answer to the teenager. Suddenly the discussion took off, and they talked for 20 minutes or more. Reflecting on this later, I speculated that the reason was probably that they had a REASON to talk, in the form of a task to do, with a tangible result to produce. The discovery that you can use tasks to induce students to talk to each other was a turning-point: I went on to develop all sorts of other speaking tasks – brainstorming, problem-solving, decision-making etc. – which also (mostly!) worked well.

Sharing stories like this with teachers is another way of linking practice to theory: it provides teachers with vicarious experience which can produce similar learning to the process described earlier: not quite so impactful, perhaps, but faster: a more economical use of time. In this case, it conveyed a clear illustration of how a teacher learns through the experiential learning cycle as described by Kolb (1984): concrete experience, followed by reflective observation, followed by abstract conceptualization, followed by active experimentation … and again.

Note that the first example above (about learning outcomes and ALT) relates to the teaching of what Widdowson (2003b) calls 'theories': ready-made concepts or hypotheses discussed in the literature, but in this example realized and reflected on through being related to actual classroom experience. The second example (task-based discussions), in contrast, relates to 'theorizing': a teacher creating her own theories through reflection on experience and using them to create further classroom practices. They share, however, the same basic rationale: the combination of theory and practice, wherever the starting point may be, in order to learn through a reflective cycle that involves both.

Kurt Lewin's famous dictum 'There is nothing so practical as a good theory' clearly refers to the kinds of theories mentioned in this section: ones that generate, explain or provide criteria for evaluating an enormous number of practical teaching procedures.

Interim summary 3

A good way to make teachers aware of the relationship between theory and practice is first to activate them in a classroom procedure that implements (or obviously fails to implement) the target theoretical concept, to elicit or explain the concept through reflective discussion of the procedure, and then to invite teachers to relate it to, or implement it in further activities. The same can be done the other

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way round: starting from a theoretical assumption, and refining it through a recursive process of experimentation, reflection, conceptualization and further experimentation.

Either of these processes can be recreated vicariously, through hearing experienced-based narrative.

5. Theory, practice, and more

The processes described above combine theory and practice, and are a very useful strategy for teacher development. I would, however, argue that there is also a place for sessions that focus primarily on theory, as well as ones that focus on practical technique, without necessarily combining them explicitly.

5.1 Focus on theory

It is very often useful for teachers to hear or read about one of the kinds of theories listed under the earlier items in the list above, even if it this is not immediately implemented in a specific practical classroom activity and processed through an experiential cycle. The purpose of such learning is not that teachers would necessarily be expected to adopt or try to implement the theory in question: I have already discussed and rejected the general assumption that theories should be implemented by practitioners. The purpose is rather to appraise and critically discuss them: to use them as a way to extend one's own professional knowledge, to raise awareness of key issues in language teaching and learning, and to think about their plausibility and implications for one's own teaching. This is particularly important in the light of a regrettable tendency for fashionable theories to be treated as virtually axiomatic by some authors, denying readers the right to question or criticize them. See, for example, a statement from one writer on methodology, quoted by Swan (2012): 'In the 21st century, it is not necessary to defend the premise that learning a foreign language should be based on a communicative approach which prioritizes meaning over the form in which this meaning is communicated' (Irún-Chavarria, 2005, p. 20).

But it is surely vital for any professional to retain the right to criticize, and, indeed, reject, any theory, however fashionable, after careful examination in the light of rational argument, experience and available research evidence (Ur, 2001).[1]

A theory can be presented through input from the teacher educator, or read about in a book or article. In any case it needs to be followed by discussion. Another possibility is to go straight into a discussion without input: raise a theoretical question, or provide a controversial statement, and ask the teachers to say how they would answer, or whether they agree or not and why. Or combine the two: give two articles presenting the 'for' and 'against' positions (for example, Skehan (1998, pp. 93–152) versus Swan (2005) on task-based instruction), and ask teachers to respond.

In either case, the discussion has two main aims. The first is simply to make sure that the theory has been understood: to iron out misunderstandings or identify differing interpretations, to ensure that its generalized implications for classroom teaching are clear, to contrast it with other theories that may oppose it. The second is to invite critical thinking, or, to put it another way, to facilitate teachers' own theorizing: how far do the teachers, including the teacher educator leading the discussion, agree with it? How far does it accord with, or conflict with, their own experience, as learners or teachers? What objections can be suggested? Where might it be more, or less, appropriate?

Let us take, for example, Pienemann's TEACHABILITY HYPOTHESIS. The basic claim was published in an article in 1984, but the theory and its implications have been extensively discussed in the literature up to the present day. It states that learners acquire morphosyntactic features of a language in a stable natural order that is impervious to teaching. This means that stages of acquisition cannot be skipped

[1]Note that this statement is indeed presented as axiomatic, since it represents my own deeply held belief and is not therefore supported by argument or evidence! But for someone coming from a different culture, it may not be self-evident. An axiom for one person may well be only a claim open to discussion for another, and vice versa.

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as a result of formal instruction and that instruction will be beneficial only if it focuses on structures which the learners are ready to acquire (i.e. have already reached the previous stage). Instruction can accelerate learning of the next stage, but it cannot alter the order. Premature instruction of a feature for which the student is not ready may have a deleterious effect on learning.

This is clearly an interesting and thought-provoking idea. Moreover, the existence of a natural order of acquisition has support in a large amount of empirical research (Pienemann, 2005), so cannot be dismissed as speculation. It also has intuitive appeal. There is, however, much to be discussed as to its implications for teaching. Points that come up in discussion with teachers include:

- It isn't really feasible with a class of 30, or even 15, to spend time identifying at which stage each individual student is.
- Even if I could do this, students are very likely to be at different levels: so how do I decide what to teach?
- On the positive side, the hypothesis could explain why some students 'catch on' when you explain a grammar point and others don't: it's not because the ones who don't catch on are stupid, or because you are teaching it badly, but simply because they are not 'ready' to learn it…
- … so this is a good reason to teach it again later, when the students are likely to have caught up.
- But if premature instruction has a 'deleterious' effect, have I harmed their progress?

… and so on.

Such input and discussion can contribute substantially to teacher knowledge and understanding, and ultimately effectiveness, even if (or partly because?) the answers are not always clear-cut, and different teachers come to different conclusions.

5.2 Practice alone

A thorough discussion of theory will inevitably relate it to practical experience, even if there is no actual cycle of reflection, conceptualization, experimentation and so on as described earlier. However, frankly practical ideas such as those described in the last few items of my list above can be discussed with little or no reference to underlying theory. These will come up in all sorts of unplanned ways: mainly during the sharing of experiences from practice teaching in preparatory courses, or within occasional unplanned digressions within a session. I would, however, suggest that we also plan for them.

One way we can do this is by inviting participants in a course to share their best tips or teaching ideas through online communication: a discussion forum in the class virtual learning environment; social media such as Facebook or Twitter; texting media such as WhatsApp, WeChat or Snapchat. Another is by setting aside class time for practical ideas. These can be participant-based: each week a participant is asked to prepare a practical tip or recipe for presentation to the class. Alternatively they can be initiated by the teacher educator: a 'Tip of the day', perhaps, at the end of the session (some examples of my own tips can be found in Ur, 2016).

Such input may be followed by discussion, during which theoretical rationales may or may not come up. Even if they do not, my argument here is that there is a place for isolated practical tips and recipes within teacher education programmes: such 'one-off' snippets of knowledge form a significant part of expertise, in language teaching as in many other professions.

Interim summary 4

A good way to combine theory and practice in teacher courses is to activate the teachers in a classroom procedure that implements the theoretical concept, elicit or explain the concept through discussion of the procedure, and then challenge teachers to apply it in different contexts, as in Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Alternatively, a theoretical idea can be implemented in practice to see if it 'works' or

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not, and then discuss the results. Teachers can also experience such learning vicariously, through encountering narratives that illustrate them.

Besides procedures which set out explicitly to combine theory and practice through the reflective cycle described above, combining theory and practice, it is also helpful at times to focus on a theory, engaging with critical discussion of its meaning(s) and implications. Practical implications are very likely to come up during the discussion, but the focus is throughout on the theory. Similarly, it is useful to learn practical ideas (recipes or tips) for their own sake, without necessarily exploring their theoretical rationale.

6. Reservations and complications

Before summing up and drawing conclusions, I need to point out that the kinds of procedures outlined above for mediating theory and practice for language teachers are only one channel through which teachers learn their profession: and arguably not even the major one. Schön (1983) compared the real world of professional action (not only teaching) to a swamp: a messy, muddy place where things do not fit into neat categories and there are no clear, consistent solutions, as compared to the 'high ground' of academic theory. From a slightly different angle, Widdowson (2003a) has suggested that teaching is both a craft and an art: a craft can be taught and learnt as a set of actions with underlying rationales; an art is more intuitive, and its insights and creations cannot always be articulated or explained. Both acknowledge that teacher preparation or development involves more than just transmitting or mediating neat models of theory and practices of teaching.

For one thing, there is the aspect of context and individual differences: things which work for one teacher may not work for another; an idea which makes sense in one context may not apply to another. For another, not everything can be made explicit: there are teachers who engage their students in enthusiastic and productive learning, but are unable to account for their methods or rationales; expert teachers take hundreds of 'on-their-feet' decisions every day, often without being able to explain, even in retrospect, their reasons. There are aspects of teaching that cannot be taught or consciously learnt in a teacher preparation course, but only learnt through extensive classroom experience.

Indeed, on the many occasions when I have asked experienced and expert practitioners what were the main things that helped them become good teachers, the vast majority put 'my own classroom experience' at the top of the list. Reading, courses, conferences, even sharing with colleagues and getting feedback from students, are seen by most of them as a less significant contributor to professional expertise.

Having acknowledged all this, however, it remains true that some measure of deliberate professional learning is essential for both novice teachers and more experienced ones. For novices, it equips them with the basic set of skills and knowledge that will enable them to enter the classroom and teach competently, without having to learn on their own through trial and error or reinvent the wheel; and it provides them with awareness of wider issues and possibilities that perhaps they will not immediately encounter in their own teaching context. For more experienced teachers, it is equally important: there is a limit to how much you can learn from your own experience, how much you can, so to speak, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. In order to advance towards real expertise, further learning of professional issues relating both to theory and to practice is surely essential, whether through a formal programme associated with an academic authority or institution leading to a qualification, or through 'one-off' conferences, webinars or workshops.

7. Summary and conclusion

In the first part of this presentation I have attempted to define what is meant by THEORY and PRACTICE in language teaching, and to clarify some allied issues with regard to the functions of of both and their relationship to one another in the context of language teacher preparation and development. In the

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second part I have suggested ways in which we might use teaching theories and practices, in combination and separately, in order to facilitate teacher learning, while acknowledging that many aspects of professional knowledge are developed through extensive experience and reflection on it, often without the teacher being consciously aware, much less able to articulate, what is being learnt.

On a personal note: the preparation of this plenary address has been for me, an attempt to articulate vague thoughts I have had over the years on the relationships between theoretical and practical aspects of my profession, and therefore a significant learning process in itself. E. M. Forster famously asked: 'How can I know what I think until I see what I say?' Alternatively, for those of us who need to write things down: 'How do I know what I think until I see what I've written?'

Perhaps this is the key to the value of teacher development sessions dealing with theory and practice through experience (immediate or vicarious), thought and discussion as described in this talk: that they force both educator and teachers to articulate what they think, understand or speculate. Intuitive learning through experience may be a major channel of professional development of individuals: but only those ideas that are made explicit can be shared and can thus contribute to professional expertise of other teachers, or of the profession as a whole.

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