

**Melissa's Story:
Bridging the Theory/Practice Gap in Teacher Education**

by [Wayne Serebrin](#) with Melissa Ryz, University of Manitoba

Abstract

This article describes a case study that explored relationships between theory and practice in a teacher candidate's learning to teach. Using a personal, narrative style, it explores one teacher-candidate's reflections about her learning with a Grade 4 student. The study was part of an innovative, inquiry-driven collaboration between school and university, and occurred during a course about teaching language and literacy in the early years (kindergarten to Grade 4) at the University of Manitoba. The student's comments suggest how the integration of theory and practice can be facilitated when teacher education makes theory explicit, and when a teacher candidate has opportunities to reflect, experiment and dialogue actively about theory in action.

I am surprised my thinking could have changed in such a short period of time. Now that I have been through this literacy inquiry from start to finish, I can see all the holes, all the wrong turns, all the missed connections. Not that my self-reflection is entirely pessimistic - I simply feel a little wiser from having had the chance to actually live in the skin of a language arts teacher. I appreciate the benefit of being able to reflect in depth on this teaching experience - to look back on the progress of my thinking as I tried to figure out where Bradley and I were and where we wanted to be. As I make my way down the road to becoming a teacher, this reflection will be an interesting reference point for me. Although, I know that the realizations and questions I have now may seem quaint or odd come next term.

This passage is from Melissa's final written reflection on six, two-hour sessions she spent with Bradley, a Grade 4 student. Melissa had collaboratively negotiated an inquiry-based literacy study (see Short, Harste, with Burke, 1996; Lindfors, 1999; Short, 1999; Serebrin, Long & Egawa, 2002; Serebrin, 2003; Mills, O'Keefe & Jennings, 2004) with Bradley, as part of her Language and Literacy teacher education course at the University of Manitoba. Through their collaborative study Bradley and Melissa both inquired into and learned about language and literacy processes, while at the same time they used these processes to explore topics of genuine interest and meaningfulness to them. When she composed this reflection, Melissa was an articulate teacher candidate in one of two second-year Early Years cohorts. The 65 Early Years teacher candidates had been paired with a Grade 3 or 4 child at a local school for one of their two Language and Literacy classes per week (classes met on different days depending on the cohort), over a six-week period in the fall term. Having already completed the first-year Language and Literacy course, focused on literacy processes and young children's language and literacy learning and development, teacher candidates in the second-year course were expected to articulate, plan, enact, and critique theoretically-consistent literacy teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment practices. As the Early Years Language and Literacy professor (for both Year 1 and Year 2), I intended to support second-year teacher candidates in this endeavour by creating an innovative teacher education experiment, about which Melissa was writing.

Over the two years, I had observed that most teacher candidates had begun to construct personal literacy education theories in our university classes. Their theories were based on professional reading, class demonstrations and conversations, personal and academic writing, and selected

class visits; during which they often heard the voices of teachers engaged in state-of-the-art literacy teaching practices. Yet, I was frustrated because many of these teacher candidates would find themselves placed in practicum school settings where they were neither able to observe or further inquire into literacy teaching practices consistent with their fledgling theories. It is after all, as Britzman (1991) argues, the practices of the teacher in the classroom, rather than those recommended in teacher education courses, that have the greatest impact on teacher candidates' subsequent practice.

Year after year my experience had been that in a substantial number of practicum settings, teacher candidates' "professional sense" (Goodman, 1989) and scholarly wondering was shut down, as they resigned themselves to merely carrying out their classroom teachers' practices without question (see also [Seifert, in this issue](#), for a discussion of some of reasons why this occurs). Of course my wish would have been to place all of these teacher candidates in practicum settings where they would find support in their attempts to articulate and enact a consistent theory of literacy education. But, because this ideal did not seem immediately feasible on a grand scale, I opted for a smaller scale experiment. I decided to turn one of my two Language and Literacy course meetings per week into an opportunity for teacher candidates to practise theoretically based literacy inquiry one-on-one with an early years child at a nearby urban school (in this issue, other individually based initiatives are described by [Youens & Bailey](#), and by [Sorensen](#)).

For this experiment I selected Elmfield School. I knew two early years teachers at the school who were proponents and masterful practitioners of literacy learning as a theoretically-based, inquiry process. The school was located close to the university, which made it possible for teacher candidates to get there and back without disrupting their university class schedule. And, because the school population was deemed "high needs," I thought this would help teacher candidates to appreciate that what they were able to accomplish in terms of literacy learning with their partners was not *only* plausible in "comfortable" school settings.

Formulating Inquiry-based Literacy Learning Plans

Denise and Lisa, my two collaborating teachers at Elmfield School, worked with me to foreground the development of caring relationships (Noddings, 1992) between the Grade 3 and 4 students and their teacher candidate partners, by initiating an exchange of letters prior to the first face-to-face meeting at the school. Bradley and Melissa's letters were typical of the group, addressing common topics of family, pets, interests and hobbies. Based on a close reading of each other's letters, both partners were also invited to find a poem they thought their partner would enjoy and present it as a gift at their first meeting. For this introductory meeting at the school, along with their letters and poems, university and school partners were to create a visual collage representing themselves in a meaning-making system other than language, and were also asked to bring a favourite book to read aloud and their writer's notebooks to share.

In her reflection after this first school visit, Melissa wrote:

At our first meeting the time flew by. Bradley seemed so excited from the very beginning - like he was about to bounce up out of his seat - which he did, occasionally. That's why the poem he shared with me (about being unable to sit still) was so appropriate. Actually, we were both caught up in the excitement of sharing what we brought and learning about each other's interests.

After Bradley read his poem and book, we shared our collages, and then he rushed on to his writer's notebook. He flipped through all the pages, talking a-mile-a-minute about his interests and observations and questions. His love of learning was obvious and delightful to see! What excites me most is his curiosity. He showed me the list of questions he wrote after his class visit to the stone quarry. These questions led us into a discussion of rocks, minerals, gems and mining. I plan to look for some non-fiction about rocks, stones, stone masons, gold mining, Stonehenge, and whatever other connecting topics I can find.

He also expressed a keen interest in fiction writing. We spoke briefly about writing an encounter with a magical stone. I'll see if I can pick up some literature that will feed this interest too.

Stones and rocks, through a child's eyes, could be a fascinating inquiry focus for our literacy study. Obviously Bradley's interest in a topic motivates his learning...and he's interested in so

many different things! Interest is so much more powerful a motivator than I first would have thought.

Theoretically, Melissa's stance as a literacy teacher was inquiry-oriented. As an effective "kidwatcher" (Goodman, 1985), she was fascinated with Bradley's curiosity and questions and she valued this "need to know" in planning her literacy instruction. One of her teaching responsibilities would also be to connect Bradley with quality children's literature, both non-fiction and fiction, as one means of opening-up and enriching the potentials of this study.

Dialoguing With Others to Make Sense of Theory/Practice Relationships

As a teacher educator it is my intent to make my own literacy theory and practice connections as explicit but as seamless as possible (Harste, Leland, Schmidt, Vasquez & Ociepka, 2004). The initial exchanges of letters and poems and the sharing of books, collages, and writer's notebooks were invitations to teacher candidates to develop caring relationships with the children, while also establishing a context for them to inquire into their partner's current interests, experience, knowledge, and literacy understandings, uses and strategies. I provided guidelines and examples of resources that teacher candidates could use or adapt in their efforts to gather and document their observations and interpretations of the children's literacy. I expected them to subsequently use this data to inform their planning of future learning experiences.

Excerpts from written reflections about each session were shared weekly with different audiences on different weeks; this might be a colleague in the same teacher education cohort, a colleague who was paired with the same child in the other cohort, the children's teachers, or me. I figured that this social learning opportunity would authorize a wide range of voices, beyond mine, and enable teacher candidates to dialogue with others who were positioned differently within our professional inquiry community, as teacher candidates tried to make sense of their sessions with the children (Duckworth, 2001).

Melissa shared her reflection on the first school session with me and with her colleague Andrea from the other section (who was also paired with Bradley). In addition to her commentary on Bradley's writer's notebook interests, Melissa made the following observations about Bradley's oral reading:

Bradley admitted to having trouble sitting still - his mind raced from one thing to the next and his body followed suit. I think the speed with which he lives his life made its way into his reading. I noticed that he was consistently oblivious to the natural pauses in the texts - he sailed right through commas and periods - and he would rather skip over a word that was giving him trouble than slow down long enough to figure it out. I think his impressive comprehension of the story was dependent on this momentum and proved its success as a strategy. On Friday I wondered if I should have encouraged him to slow down a little to focus more on particular words that gave him trouble, but since then I have decided to limit my interruptions to moments when his understanding is threatened by a miscue.

We did experiment with a couple of reading strategies during Bradley's reading of The Wolseley Elm. On one page I got him to focus on the particular word he was having trouble with instead of letting him skip over it so quickly. We talked about what he normally does when he comes to something he doesn't know and he named a lot of different strategies, including breaking the word apart and sounding out the parts. So, he is aware of these other strategies. I wonder how he decides which strategies to use and when.

In the margins of this excerpt, I wrote that Melissa's consideration of whether to intervene or not when Bradley raced through punctuation and skipped over problematic words was based on her theoretical understanding of reading as a meaning-making process. The evidence of this was in her decision to intervene only if Bradley's "miscues" (instances when readers' observed responses differ from their expected responses; Goodman, 1996) compromised his understanding of the text. I noted too that by talking with Bradley about his reading strategies, she enabled him to theorize - make his thinking processes explicit. Finally, I suggested that by continuing to closely observe Bradley as a reader, reading different texts for different purposes over the next few weeks, she might very well find patterns in Bradley's reading strategy use that would answer some of her professional inquiry questions and perhaps generate new ones.

Given the focus of this first session, Melissa was not the only teacher candidate to make reading process observations or to ask inquiry questions about them. Being a kidwatcher myself in the context of teacher candidates' learning, I created a reading case study invitation for our next class

that invited teacher candidates to revisit some of the reading process issues we had explored in first-year - now that they had a more urgent "need to know".

This first week, Andrea, her colleague in the other cohort, also responded to Melissa's reflection. She thanked Melissa for her insights and her specific and detailed observations, and agreed with Melissa's suggestion that the two of them would look for opportunities for Bradley to encourage a more reluctant reader in the group to "*turn onto the joy of books*". Even in her few appreciative words to Melissa, Andrea too kept the focus on the big picture of what literacy is for, as she touched on ideas of *relationship* and *community*.

Formulating and "Fixing" Understandings, Knowledge and Beliefs

I arrived at Elmfield with a pile of books for our second session together. I'd checked out every possible children's book that connected in some way to magic rocks, rocks, stones, etc. But, when we met in Bradley's classroom this week (instead of the library where we had been last week), I was immediately struck by all of the rock books, rock samples, rock posters, rock everything that greeted me from every corner of the room! What I thought was Bradley's burning, personal desire to know everything he could about rocks, was actually a whole class inquiry. He hadn't told me that he was already pursuing his questions as part of a class study connected to the Manitoba Grade 4 Science Curriculum. As this realization was washing over me, I quickly decided that it didn't really matter; we could focus on other literacy possibilities. I had gathered a selection of beautiful fiction stories about rocks, including Sylvester and the Magic Pebble, which Bradley chose for us to read together - each of us reading a page at a time.

The book was a little difficult for Bradley as he encountered a lot of new and/or unfamiliar vocabulary. When I encouraged him to use some of the different strategies he knew, he was able to figure out what many of the words meant based on context clues. When he had difficulty with a particular page, I would ask him to summarize what had just happened on the previous page and then I would ask him to predict what might happen next.

I have now observed Bradley consistently using a range of reading strategies to help him decode and understand the book. He breaks words into manageable chunks, uses phonics knowledge, skips words, and repeats sentences to gain momentum and contextual information. His strategies

work for him because he always has a good understanding of what he has read, even when it seems he's miscued or omitted an important word.

Bradley and I discussed many aspects of the story while we were reading. We talked about how we thought the characters felt at different points in the story. Bradley seemed to understand the concept of irony, though I didn't name it for him. Thinking about it again now, I really should have.

For an experienced teacher, let alone a beginner, in any given teaching moment there is so much to attend to - multiple, often fleeting and disconnected observations, and any number of possible responses and instructional decisions - but there is no freeze-frame button. Theory, however, provides a way to systematically organize this seeming blur of impressions and potential actions into a more coherent interpretation. A teacher's theory empowers her to make connections among observations and to establish patterns from which to respond and make thoughtful teaching decisions. Because of her theoretical understanding of the reading process, Melissa was in a position to reflect-in-action (Schön, 1982) on Bradley's reading and to suggest larger text-based strategies (summarizing and predicting) when he became "bogged down" in new or unfamiliar vocabulary. This theoretical knowledge enabled her to resist teaching practices she had experienced in her own schooling and observed in her first-year practicum that stressed accurate, word-for-word reading. She also believed in inviting Bradley into new intellectual conversations - in this particular reflection, exploring the concept of irony. As Melissa had opportunities to unify theory and practice by talking and writing about connections she noticed, and by testing out her theory, she momentarily "fixed" her messy, under-construction understandings, knowledge and beliefs. This allowed her, in turn, to build self-confidence in what she knew and the teaching actions she might take.

Rethinking Arising Out of Tensions Between Theory and Practice

Reflecting further on her second school visit, Melissa wrote:

After we read Sylvester and the Magic Pebble, I asked Bradley to start brainstorming ideas for his own story about a magic rock. There - that's what I would change if I could do it differently. I basically said, "Go forth and write about that which I consider worthy." I don't even know how it

happened. What if that was not the connection he made to the story? What if he really wanted to write about donkeys as a consequence of reading this book? I'll never know because I was utterly focused on the rock thing! It's embarrassing.

Thankfully, Bradley is a confident, diplomatic boy. He pursued his own connection anyway, in spite of my unintentional prescription. The way he did so reveals a lot about him. He started sketching some of the ideas for a story, and began naturally with a large, round boulder in the middle of the page. Then, as he discovered Goku - the character that would eventually occupy centre stage in his story - he became more and more eager to bring him into focus. After spending considerable time sketching Goku's motorcycle and castle, he erased the rock altogether. Bradley composed aspects of the story aloud while he was drawing and I took notes. Later, when he took control of the pencil himself, he wrote - seemingly out of nowhere - "and Goku saw the rock was gone and he couldn't believe it." As no rock had been mentioned in his story (and he had already erased the rock he had drawn), there was no rock to disappear. It's obvious that Bradley was simply trying to appease me by putting a small piece of what he thought I wanted to hear into his story. This taught me a lot about Bradley. He tries his hardest to please other people. Thankfully he was assertive enough to go off in his own direction even when he felt compelled to complete the task I had set.

What I learned from this experience is that every word out of a teacher's mouth is important. I cannot be blasé about it - what I say has a real effect on the children I teach. This isn't a stunning revelation, I know. But the realization that I unknowingly had this effect on Bradley because I didn't consciously monitor my language use stunned me nonetheless. I have to be more sensitive about giving children honest space if I want them to write creatively, instead of boxing them in right from the beginning.

Was Melissa making too much of this scenario? I don't think so. What she sensitively observed in Bradley's sketching and writing were his attempts to please her - "to complete the task [she] had set." Theoretically, in this small incident, Melissa interrogates the transformative potential of critical democracy as a "way of life" in the classroom (Dewey, 1938/63; Greene, 1988; Freire, 1998; among others). Bradley's initial "large, round boulder" sketch and his written explanation of the disappearance of the rock from the story suggests to Melissa that he subordinately

positioned himself with respect to her authority as a teacher. While Melissa does not frame her discomfort from a critical democracy perspective, she is concerned that prescribing the topic for Bradley's writing potentially constrained his voice and choice as a writer (even though he found a way around this). Melissa's theory acts as a "self-corrective device" (Harste et al., 2004) - next time she will find a way to give young writers "honest space...instead of boxing them in right from the beginning." In many early years literacy classrooms, teachers without Melissa's theoretical stance might never think twice about how prescribing writing topics can constrain how young writers position themselves (thereby maintaining typical, hegemonic, classroom power relationships). And, just as Melissa wished she had named "the concept of irony" for Bradley and invited him into an intellectual conversation about it, I wished I had similarly named this "critical democracy" concept for Melissa and begun an intellectual conversation about it with her.

Taking Time to Clarify What Matters and To Whom

While I missed the opportunity to dialogue with Melissa about "critical democracy" related to her meeting with Bradley, fortunately the opportunity to revisit this concept resurfaced the following week in our university Language and Literacy class.

In written responses to teacher candidates' reflections, and in informal conversations with teacher candidates and their grade 3 and 4 partners during the second week, Denise and Lisa (the two classroom teachers) had asked teacher candidates why they had chosen their particular inquiry-based literacy topics. While the overriding focus of the University of Manitoba/Elmfield School experiment was a response to the questions "who is your child partner as a literacy user/learner?" and "how will you support his/her learning?," the specific topics of study and literacy processes highlighted were left to teacher candidates to collaboratively negotiate with the children.

While it was expected that the children would be engaged in learning literacy, learning about literacy, and learning through literacy (Halliday, 1982), and that teacher candidates would plan with relevant and essential ideas from the Manitoba English Language Arts curriculum (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996), the actual topic of study was left to the child/teacher candidate partners to decide. What had begun to worry Denise and Lisa was that the children

might have pressured teacher candidates to choose only topics that came from the children's outside-of-school experiences with popular culture (television shows, video games, advertisements, etc.). They worried that some of these topics might not only have limited depth in terms of new learning for the children, but even more that they could be steeped in "violence" - which the two of them abhorred and which they had tried hard to exclude from any classroom literacy endeavours.

In response to Denise and Lisa's concerns, at our next university class I shared a short passage from Anne Haas Dyson's (1997) book Writing Superheroes: Contemporary Childhood, Popular Culture, and Classroom Literacy, explained Denise and Lisa's position, and opened up the conversation to the class. In her third week's reflection, Melissa picked up on this class conversation:

I'm going to change gears here and write a little about what was addressed in class this week - some children's propensity to violence in story writing. The only time so far that Bradley has brought any violence into his story was during our second visit, when we had just begun to talk about the possible places the action of his story might go. When the library in his story was magically transformed into a castle, he imagined a guard trying to protect the castle with violent force. It's tricky though, because it's accurate - probably what a guard would do when faced with a trespasser. Bradley got it exactly right. In addition, in medieval literature (and Bradley's story - with its concoction of magic, castles, and a guard - is thematically in this vein) sword fights and knight and dragon battles occur with frequency. It's a staple of the genre. Medieval literature isn't the only place where violence is used to heighten the drama - Shakespeare is full of violence and murder and gruesome deaths. Is violence okay in the classroom when it has a literary connection? But is it not okay when it has a pop culture connection? Why is this? Who decides? It sure is a pickle.

Melissa's questions created a second natural opportunity for the critical democracy conversation I missed having with her the previous week. In margin comments, I agreed with her that if we concur with Lankshear and Knobel's (2003) descriptions of the multiple, changing, digitally saturated, and socially and politically constructed nature of "new literacies" in today's world, then why would violence be acceptable when served up in literature but not in popular, digital

genres? But not having sufficient experience with the popular digital genres with which some of the children were familiar, we wondered if there was a difference in the nature of violence represented in children's literature and children's popular culture, and if this difference itself needed to be critically interrogated? From this conversation, we decided that we had a responsibility to help children understand how literacy in whatever form positions them and others (Gee, 1996; Luke & Freebody, 1997). "If, as teachers, we consider violence as a repugnant social value," I wrote to Melissa, "then is it not our responsibility to make violence problematic wherever children encounter it - especially where it is most common place or taken for granted in the children's everyday lives?" I offered Melissa a copy of a *School Talk* (October, 2002), a professional literacy newsletter, titled "Everyday Texts/Everyday Literacies," which I had just read.

In her final reflection, Melissa gained enough distance from her next couple of writing sessions with Bradley to re-examine what mattered most to her and to Bradley. She now appreciated that every writing lesson she taught was not of equal value to Bradley. Her literacy theory functions here as a device for helping her to make practice decisions about what she would de-emphasize if she were to plan these lessons again. At the time that she was teaching these lessons, she had too many pieces of the puzzle to work with. In this more distanced reflection, she came to understand her teaching practice with more clarity. I believe her reflection is evidence of her growing intellectual flexibility:

During the next couple of sessions, Bradley worked on his story. As he wrote, we discussed the ideas as they developed and I found myself continually asking him questions about the relationships between characters, the motivations each character had to keep the book from each other, and most especially, his understanding of the inherent importance of this book. His answer was consistently, "because it's Goku's. He wrote it." The fact that Goku wrote it was reason enough to go to the ends of the earth if he had to, to get it back. I think this reasoning reveals a lot about Bradley's feelings about writing and the incredible importance of owning one's writing.

The discussion also revealed a potential for a future lesson. At times, I became confused with the plot line of the story, and wondered if it was simply because Bradley had not yet ordered his ideas into a logical sequence. I decided to work with him on that.

I think the work we did on revision was really valuable, but my weekly reflections show that I may have turned this into too big of a focus for Bradley. In my future classroom, when I have the scope of an entire year to work with children, I would never ask a child to revise and edit his work as early in the game as I asked of Bradley. However, I think the time factor influenced my decision to push the process up a bit. We worked on writing with a reader in mind; organising ideas logically; condensing small sentences into a single, coherent sentence; and inserting dialogue markers to help keep the ideas clear. I don't think I would eliminate these lessons if I was to do it again, but for Bradley's sake I think I would have given some of them much less time. I did worry about burning out his love of writing. My writing lessons were well intentioned, but perhaps a bit over the top.

Savouring the Experience

In the rush of the moment, when we are faced with making on-the-spot teaching decisions, it is sometimes difficult to appreciate the value of what has been accomplished. Reflective writing, after some time away from the experience of searching for answers and strategies to immediate problems, can sometimes provide the time and space needed to regroup and savour all that has been done. There is a distinct tone of celebration in Melissa's reflection on her final teaching sessions with Bradley:

Of course, in spite of my misgivings and stuttered attempts at teaching competence, Bradley showed continuous enthusiasm. When his interest in our revision and editing lessons began to wane, I knew I had taken things too far. That's when we changed gears a little bit, left the Goku story unfinished for the moment, and started sewing a quilt for his teddy bear (the idea for this new inquiry direction had grown out of a conversation we'd had the week before). Bradley loved learning to sew, loved the idea of making something for his bear, and looked forward to writing a good night poem for Snowball - the beginning of a bedtime ritual (I'm sure he also loved the break from revising and editing his story). Whatever the reason, our shift to the teddy bear

project was a huge hit. Now I only wish we had started it sooner - we could have read some great stories, had a teddy bear picnic.... As it turned out, the writing that came out of this change of focus was beautiful. I think it's an example of wonderfully personal and relevant writing.

We quickly went over the mechanical necessities for making a quilt - making sure our square patches were symmetrical, threading the needle, planning the design, and sewing the squares together. Next, we began to think about the place to put the poem once we had written it. We talked about putting one word in each square.

Bradley began to tell me what Snowball was thinking about, tucked under his new quilt. Instead of telling me, I suggested he write down what he was about to say. Just like that, Bradley had the first stanza for his poem. "So, you can imagine what Snowball would do if he were alive?" I asked. He wrote a second stanza. The logical next question following from his second stanza was: "If he were part of our literacy inquiry study what would he want to learn?" Bradley answered this question with 3 sentences, and immediately commented that it was beginning to look more like another story than a poem. It was a good observation because although his language sounded poetic, the way the words were arranged on the page was decidedly prose-like. I suggested he could do two things to turn this story back into a poem. He could separate his ideas into lines and stanzas; but this could happen later, after he had his ideas down (after our Goku story writing, this made even more sense to me than it did before the project began). I helped him trim the fat from his sentences. He kept only the most important words or ideas. The last stanza emerged when I asked him if there was anything else he wanted to add before Snowball fell asleep. I had a picture of sheep in my head, but Bradley came up with the image of counting stars, following from Snowball's learning to add. He wrote the last line and... "ta-da" - a poem:

Snowball
By Bradley

My teddy bear thinks that
he can talk
and be alive
and walk on his
bare feet

If he were alive he would
swim
play sports
and learn
If he could learn he would
write
surf the net
and add If he could add he would
count the stars to fall asleep

I love this poem. It's so deeply personal, so childlike and sweet and spontaneous. The form was invented on the spot just through back-and-forth questions and answers. For my first attempt at guiding a child in poetry writing, I think it went well. I'm glad, because before this session, doing something like this seemed so completely elusive. This time I think I also did a better job of letting Bradley determine the direction his writing would take.

Finally, Melissa closes her reflection with these thoughts:

...In spite of my many self-criticisms, I am quite proud of the work the two of us did together. I think the teaching inquiry process I went through, as a teacher-learner, was valuable. I also think the literacy inquiry we did together led Bradley to a lot of practical writing strategies he will use in his future writing. We did a lot of work on revision - organizing the big ideas so that they make sense and compressing many small sentences into one or two juicy ones. We composed a poem just by asking and answering questions. We made literary connections to objects, ideas and experiences that are deeply personal. And, Bradley learned to use dialogue markers to separate speech from narrative.

Even though the rock study didn't go anywhere, I think I did a good job of offering Bradley a "gazillion" possibilities for where he could have taken it. This is an aspect of my teaching in which I now have confidence - the ability to not only see the possibilities, but to present opportunities to follow them up.

Theory and practice are never very far apart for Melissa. Assuming an inquiry teaching stance, she was determined to create consistency between what she believed theoretically and what she did in practice. For any teacher this is a complex and messy process, which demands constant

revisiting (Harste et al., 2004). It is not likely something a "teacher-learner" (as she named herself) is ever likely to complete.

One of the pervasive strengths of this teacher education experiment, from my perspective, was that Melissa and her colleagues did not have to work out their theoretical practice entirely on their own. Theory was not the sole domain of the university, nor was the classroom the only legitimate place for exploring literacy practices. For the 6-week period of this experiment, the two were fused. As a teacher educator, I was in the fortunate position of being able to observe what teacher candidates were trying to do with their grade 3 and 4 partners and support them in our other university classes each week. For example, I knew that in Year 1 teacher candidates had given considerable thought to revision in terms of their own writing of family stories, as part of our university class writer's workshops. They had read professionally about revision, examined children's writing samples, and viewed videotapes of early years teachers working with young writers. But, when teacher candidates encountered the children's need to revise their writing in the authentic context of their literacy inquiries, we were now able to revisit this topic in a much more meaningful way - with genuine questions in mind and with children's real writing samples in hand. Theory now "served as an anchor, a self-renewing strategy, and a point of reflection" (Harste et al., 2004, p. 31) for our whole teacher education inquiry community.

At this celebratory point in this paper, it seems fitting to hear Bradley's voice. At the end of the 6 weeks, Denise and Lisa asked the children to reflect on their literacy inquiries with their university partners. These are Bradley's comments (for the reader's sake, I have edited Bradley's spelling and punctuation):

I like how I made a very good story. It took a while to do and it's like an adventure. You would get excited! There's good language in it and we got words from a thesaurus. We wanted it to be cool and awesome. We brainstormed and thought a lot of the ideas ourselves and we also read parts from some other books.

I also like how I made a poem for my teddy and I have descriptive words in it. I wrote it from questions.

New Horizons

This paper shows how thoroughly integrated theory and practice can become in a teacher candidate's learning-to-teach life, when teacher education makes theory explicit and when teacher candidates have opportunities to actively experiment with, dialogue about, and reflect upon theory in action. As an inquiring learner, Melissa became her own expert. Her learning (and Bradley's too) was facilitated by a supportive environment based on trust, security, and interaction with and support from others. I can only imagine how far Melissa would have travelled "down the road to becoming a teacher" (see her reflection at the beginning of this article) had she had an opportunity to participate in a sustained and in depth university/classroom collaborative inquiry, beyond this single-course experiment (but for cautions, see [Seifert](#), this issue).

To this end, following the lead of the Centre for Inquiry School in Columbia (South Carolina, USA; see Mills & Donnelly, 2001) and the Centre for Inquiry School in Indianapolis (Indiana, USA; see Harste et al., 2004), in the fall of 2004, the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba will enter into an educational partnership with a local school division (Pembina Trails) and the provincial government (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth) to establish a Centre for Inquiry School. Here, second year Early Years faculty and teacher candidates will collaborate on-site with Kindergarten to Grade 4 children, families, and teachers and school administrators to support and enhance one another's learning. In this reconceptualized model of teacher education, teacher candidates will theoretically have the opportunity to build consistent theory and practices from intentionally connected inquiry-based experiences. The future Melissas and Bradleys and their colleagues and peers deserve no less.

References

- Britzman, D.P. (1991). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938/1963). *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Duckworth, E. (Ed.). (2001). *"Tell me more": Listening to learners explain*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dyson Haas, A. (1997). *Writing superheroes: Contemporary childhood, popular culture, and classroom literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers.
- Gee, J. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (2nd ed.). London: Taylor & Francis.
- Goodman, K. (1996). *On reading*. Richmond Hill, ON: Scholastic Canada.
- Goodman, Y. (1989). Evaluation of students: Evaluation of teachers. In S. Wilde (Ed.), *Notes from a kidwatcher: Selected writings of Yetta M. Goodman* (pp. 228-241). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Goodman, Y. (1985). Kidwatching: Observing children in the classroom. In S. Wilde (Ed.), *Notes from a kidwatcher: Selected writings of Yetta M. Goodman* (pp. 219-227). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1982). Three aspects of children's language development: Learning language, learning through language, learning about language. In Y. Goodman, M. H. Haussler, and D. Strickland (Eds.), *Oral and written language development research* (7-19). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Harste, J., Leland, C., Schmidt, K., Vasquez, V., & Ocepka, A. (January/February, 2004). Practice makes practice, or does it? The relationship between theory and practice in teacher education. *Reading Online*, 7(4). Available: <www.readingonline.org>.
- Lindfors Wells, J. (1999). *Children's inquiry: Using language to make sense of the world*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Luke, A., & Freebody, P. (1997). Shaping the social practices of reading. In S. Muspratt, A. Luke, and P. Freebody (Eds.), *Constructing critical literacies* (185-225). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training. (1996). *Kindergarten to Grade 4 English language arts: Manitoba curriculum framework of outcomes and Grade 3 standards*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Training.

McGregor, C. (no date). *The Wolseley Elm*. Winnipeg, MB: Contact Cheri Frazer at <cfrazer@escape.ca>.

Mills, H., O'Keefe, T., & Jennings, L.B. (2004). *Looking closely & listening carefully: Literacy learning through inquiry*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Mills, H., & Donnelly, A. (2001). (Eds.). *From the ground up: Creating a culture of inquiry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books Inc.

Serebrin, W., Long, S., & Egawa, E. (2001). *An inquiry into early literacy*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English Reading Initiative.

Serebrin, W. (Ed.). (January, 2003). Inquiries into early literacy. *School Talk* 8(2), 1-6.

Short, K., Harste, J., with Burke, C. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and Inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Short, K. (1999). The search for "balance" in a literature-rich curriculum. In *Theory into Practice*, 38(3), 130-137.

Steig, W. (1969). *Sylvester and the magic pebble*. New York: Windmill.

Vasquez, V. & Egawa, K. (Eds.). (October, 2002). Everyday texts/everyday literacies. *School Talk*, 8(1), 1-6. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.