STUDYING TEACHER COGNITION:
THE INTERPLAY OF TEACHER BELIEFS AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with examining a secondary school teacher's teaching of literature in relation to her underlying cognition. In particular, it will show the interplay of her beliefs systems and her instructional practice. Starting from a brief discussion of what makes up a literature teacher's beliefs systems, the paper describes one teacher-participant's instructional practice and beliefs system seen from a particular framework then presents possible implications for teacher training. Part of a larger study based on what current research on teacher education reveals regarding the influences on and the formation of teachers' instructional practice and their approach to instructional decision-making, the paper similarly subscribes to the idea that improvement of classroom instruction begins with understanding teachers' conceptions and how these are translated into their classroom practice.

About the Author

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AN OVERVIEW OF METHODS, APPROACHES, AND TEACHER COGNITION

For the past 50 years, there has been much research done on second language learning and teaching to help teachers teach the English language better. Methods have been examined and evaluated on the basis of their conceptual underpinnings, and some, on the basis of empirical or quantitative studies. From the audio-lingual method and behaviorist strand popular in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the pendulum swung to the cognitivist and nativist approaches almost a decade later. During the 70s and early 80s, other approaches were introduced– functional/notional, structural, natural, communicative, etc., which are basically just variations, if not modifications of behaviorism and cognitivism.

There was an emergence of several approaches to literary analysis as well. During the 50s and 60s, literary analysis was dominated by New Criticism, which was

quickly challenged by a variety of approaches that questioned the premise that the text was primary and possessed a single, determinate meaning—from reader-response to deconstruction, feminism, structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxism, and postmodernism among others

Yet literature teaching is a different matter. There are diverse, if not opposing approaches to teaching it. On one end, literature is seen as "caught," that is, in the process of analysis and discussions in class, students will naturally catch the ability to read appropriately. Then there is the transmissive mode of teaching, where the teacher retreats to teaching about literature—for example, giving students biographical facts about the author, descriptions of literary movements and critical approaches that inform the texts (Short and Candlin 89-109). These approaches, some ESL experts have noted (e.g. Carter and Long 1991, Long 1986 and Carter and Mc Rae 1996), are appropriate for native speakers. Non-native speakers of English need a methodology that can provide the students with a way into a literary text, and help them raise questions about its meaning, thus the language-based approaches that argue for the teaching of literature as language (Carter 110-32).

What the related literature yields, however, is information that is mostly normative, rather than descriptive (Woods). This focuses on theory and classroom techniques that prescribe, rather than describe. More importantly, these do not consider the viewpoint of the teacher—an important participant in the classroom events. Given all these available approaches from which the teacher can choose, what does the teacher actually practice in the classroom? In planning activities and interpreting classroom events, what approach does the teacher essentially subscribe to?

In the Philippines, the English class at the secondary level consists of both English language and literature in English. A quick survey of English textbooks used in the country's secondary schools reveals a confused picture—some textbooks contain both literature and language lessons, while others separate the two. An informal interview of secondary school teachers yields the same thing—some teachers "integrate" the teaching of language and literature (either by using literature as a springboard for grammar or as a culmination of a language class), while others simply teach language and literature separately. Ravina's review of English and Filipino DECS[1] textbooks conveys her observation that the idea of integration remains unclear. Moreover, the very difference itself of teaching language using literary texts or excerpts and teaching reading and literature for appreciation and literary competence has not been clearly delineated.

A look at the DECS Rationale for the Proposed 1989 English Curriculum[2] reveals

separate programs for Language and Literature and does not really provide a clear picture of the place of literature in the English class. A closer analysis of the competencies prescribed, however, shows that Literature is seen as a means of promoting a set of skills, encouraging a set of attitudes and affective states, and providing information (Burke and Brumfit). After four years of studying literature, secondary school students are expected to:

Demonstrate thinking and literary skills essential for handling the communicative and linguistic demands of literature;
Understand and appreciate the form and function of various literary types;
Discover literature as a means of gaining vicarious experience; and
Show a keener sense of values of what is worthwhile and what is not through literature (DECS).

The 2002 Basic Education Curriculum, which now emphasizes "contextualized, interactive and integrated" language learning, identifies almost similar competencies. If the old curriculum categorized the competencies according to general skills and content/substance, the new curriculum uses no such categories, but seems to emphasize the "worthwhile universal human values and experiences" that students discover through reading literature (DepEd Operations Handbook).

As such, studying literature is presumed to equip the students with the skills necessary for them to read literature, i.e., to make sense of and understand the formal elements that work in unity to create the meaning in a literary text. Studying literature, therefore, means unearthing this meaning or message in order to "experience" what all of humanity have experienced and thus gain understanding of what society accepts and values.

Clearly, in terms of critical approach, what is subscribed to here is New Criticism which aims to explore the relationship between meaning and form through "techniques of close reading and the assumption that the test of any critical activity is whether it helps us to produce richer, more insightful interpretation of individual works" (Culler). However, in terms of methodology, it is one which has been regarded by ESL scholars as suitable for native speakers of English but not ESL/EFL students (Carter and Long; Long 42-59; Carter and Mc Rae) such as those in the Philippines. Moreover, the DECS-prescribed competencies assume that if students have been equipped with the necessary thinking and literary skills, they will be able to unearth the meaning, i.e., understand the literary text. What Carter, Long, and McRae point out, however, is that linguistic competence should precede

literary competence. But the competencies assume that students already possess linguistic competence which, in reality, they do not have.

Do literature teachers in Philippine Secondary Schools subscribe to this critical approach and methodology as well? Given the diverse repertoire of approaches to teaching literature available to them and the seemingly prescribed approach by the DECS curriculum, how do these teachers teach literature? Is literature teaching *a part of* or *apart from* language teaching? More importantly, what beliefs guide this pedagogical approach?

This paper[3] is concerned with examining one secondary school teacher's teaching of literature in relation to her underlying cognition. In particular, it is concerned with what she brings inside the literature classroom—the pedagogical activities and classroom discourses that make up the literature classroom, as these reveal her planning process, and ultimately, her beliefs.

The study is based on what current research on teacher education reveals—that what teachers do (i.e. teachers' instructional practice) and how they approach instructional decision-making (i.e. make decisions about implementation of curriculum, including what techniques, activities and teaching style will be used) are influenced, if not shaped by what they know and what they believe in (e.g. Thompson 1984, Burns 1996, Smith 1996, Woods 1996, She 2000).

Understanding teacher cognition is vital to understanding the nature of teacher education and our roles as teacher educators. Knowing teachers' conceptualizations of teaching, their beliefs and how these translate to classroom instruction will provide teacher educators with knowledge on how to support teachers (Freeman and Richards) and, in the long run, improve classroom instruction. More importantly, understanding teacher cognition ultimately leads to better learning in the classroom. When teachers become aware of what they do in the classroom and what influences their teaching and decision-making, they will know what they need to maintain or improve in their teaching.

In the Philippines, in particular, investigating the cognition of the ESL/EFL literature teacher will hopefully set forth the need to include a study of what literature teachers bring into the classroom in teacher education or teacher development courses. In doing so, we not only start off a culture of reflective teaching practice, but also generate a breed of teachers who do not immediately turn to seminars and seminar hand-outs for ready-made solutions to their teaching problems and woes, but rather turn to themselves first in order to understand what ails their teaching.

UNDERSTANDING TEACHER COGNITION

A central concern of the study is determining literature teachers' beliefs about literature, learning, and teaching, as this forms the core of their instructional practice and decision-making. It is thus important to first discuss, the different reasons for teaching literature, and the various approaches that have been used to teach it.

The reasons for teaching literature are as diverse as the approaches for teaching it. F. R. Leavis, in his book *Education and the University* says that the literary critical is the essential and true discipline of an English School because it

> trains, in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensitivity together, cultivating sensitiveness and precision of response and a delicate integrity of intelligence—intelligence that integrates as well as analyzes and must have pertinacity and staying power as well as delicacy … [it can] provide an incomparably inward and subtle initiation into the nature and significance of tradition. (qtd. in Widdowson 72)

Teaching literature, therefore, ensures the formation of individuals who are familiar with the significance of tradition. This perspective is built on the assumption that literature (the object of the literary critical) expresses the tradition (or society's values and beliefs) that Leavis refers to. Thus, studying literature is essentially like studying and learning about society's values and beliefs.

Leavis' reasons seem to focus more on the cultural aspect of teaching literature. Teachers who work within this orientation which Carter and Long call *The Cultural Model*, emphasize the value of literature as embodying the wisdom of all times—"the best that has been taught and felt within a culture" (2). Literature is regarded as expressing timeless and universal truths which students need to be in touch with.

Another possible reason for teaching literature is to help students appreciate literature and thus read on their own. In *The Personal Growth Model*, the literature teacher uses literature to impart to students the "lasting pleasures in reading and a deep satisfaction in a continuing growth of understanding" (Carter and Long 3). Thus, students study literature to develop enjoyment and love for it.

In talking about the use of literature in the classroom, Maley refers to the above two models as *Literature for study* which approaches literary texts as "aesthetically patterned artifacts." (qtd. in Carter and McRae xix-xxviii). Thus, the study of texts involves knowledge of critical concepts, conventions and the metalanguage of literary criticism, and

even information about the history of the target literature, its traditions, or its heritage. *Literature for study* "fosters an understanding of literature as a body of texts, and a view of literary texts as belonging to a "background" of specific, historical, social and ideological constructs" (Carter and Long 3).

Carter and Long identify another reason for teaching literature: to use it as an instrument for teaching specific vocabulary or structures or for language manipulation— *The Language Model*. Proponents of this model argue that language is the medium of literature, and that literature is made from language, and that "the more students can read in and through language, the better able they will be to come to terms with a literary text as literature" (2).

Maley refers to this as using *Literature as Resource.* When used as resource, literature is regarded as language in use and can be exploited for language teaching purposes. The work done on the language of the text, however, is but a means to service literary goals.

It is this third reason that seems most significant to ESL and EFL teachers. If literature is authentic text which provides samples of language resources, couldn't this be used in teaching the English language to non-native speakers to help them develop competence in language, at the same time learn about the culture underlying the text? Moreover, students enjoy the learning because of the pleasures brought by reading literature.

Given these reasons for teaching literature, how can it be taught? A *teacher-centered* literature classroom is characterized by the teacher doing most of the talking inside the classroom. Here, the teacher works through the text, asks a long series of questions which elicit responses about the meanings of words, phrases, or metaphors occurring in the text. At times, this process focuses on small units, which may not have significance in the appreciation of the whole work, nor does it relate the text to the learners' wider experience. In a teacher-centered classroom, decision-making relies entirely on the teacher.

A *learner-centered* literature classroom allows students to explore and respond to the literary texts. Instead of relying on judgments made by the teacher or the so-called authorities, students make their own judgments as a result of techniques they refined and developed for their own use. A learner-centered literature classroom is "exploratory, simple, text-based, and uses a limited range of technical terms" (Carter and Long 27). What is the role of the teacher in a student-centered class? The teacher chooses the most appropriate way of making the texts accessible to the students and is a facilitator who provides students with opportunities to explore the texts.

The teaching of literature can also be described as either *product-oriented* or *process-*

oriented (Carter and McRae). Literature teaching as *product* regards the text as a source of information which students have to acquire. It is information-based and transmissive in operation (Carter and Long). There is more concern with the development of knowledge about literature than an actual direct experience of it (Carter and McRae). Students therefore do not learn how to use this knowledge to read literature for themselves or to learn how to make their own meanings. As a result, students rely on "authorities" to determine the meanings of texts. Analytical and study techniques which focus on the text as holistic and intact are *product-oriented*. Pedagogies involve the development of skills for reading texts as objects of study; techniques are presented for the students to acquire, with the assumption that students will learn the techniques by practice.

However, one cannot simply expose students to literary texts and hope that they will get the meaning. There is an assumption in the use of *product-oriented* teaching that students have already developed an awareness of the way language is used in literary texts. For this reason, product-oriented teaching is not suited for students who are non-native speakers of English. There already exists a language barrier which hinders them from getting into the meaning of the text. As a result, students are too busy translating unfamiliar words and phrases to respond to the text. The *Cultural Model* of literature teaching discussed earlier is teacher-centered and transmissive in nature, focusing on the text as a product about which students learn to acquire information.

Literature teaching as a *process* is concerned primarily with activating student response. Its orientation moves away from teacher-centeredness towards learner-centered, activity-based lessons which aim to encourage personal response and involvement from students and to develop their perception and sensitivity. The text is not seen as possessing a single determinate meaning; nor is there only one way to read a text. Students develop self-sufficiency, and rely less on the teacher—they are able to work out for themselves their own preferred modes of reading (Carter and Long).

Response here, however, should be distinguished from criticism (where students are asked to write critical essays). Response (at least as far as non-native speakers are concerned) is a "classroom interaction between the teacher and the learner" (Brumfit and Carter 43). Any reaction on the part of the learner, therefore, whether written or spoken, is considered a response. Long differentiates *verbal response* (where students answer text-based questions from the teacher), *activity response* (where students are involved in some kind of a task) and *individual response* (where students make their own value judgments of the text).

According to researchers and ESL writers, an effective way of eliciting student

response is through the interface of language and literature, that is, the use of language-based approaches in studying literary texts. The approach is activity-based, that is, students participate in making literature mean. It is process-oriented, because the responsibility of making the texts mean is placed on the students themselves (Carter and McRae).

The use of language-based approaches provides students a way into the text—a preliminary, if not a pre-literary process of understanding and appreciating the literary text (Carter). These do not necessarily lead to a literary interpretation, but they provide a firm basis for one by developing the interpretative and inferencing skills of students, particularly on the relations between forms and meanings—skills which are crucial to the production of meaning (Carter and Long). Some of the language-based activities used in the classroom are prediction exercises, cloze exercises, ranking tasks, summaries, fora, guided re-writing, matching exercises, using grids and charts.

Language-based activities can be used to lead to a more systematic study of the language used in literary texts or a stylistic analysis of the text. Stylistics is an approach to the study of texts which involves analyzing language forms in order to explain how a text means what it means. In other words, through stylistic analysis, students develop an awareness of language use, and their "sensitivity to literary styles and purposes" is heightened (Carter and Long 121). They are therefore able to make their own interpretations (rather than rely on interpretations made by "authorities") based on systematic verbal analysis and even show others how these interpretations are reached (Carter and McRae).

Because Stylistics foregrounds language so much, a number of scholars have criticized it. Stylistics tends to assume that there is one central meaning to a text, and a close scrutiny of the language will yield this meaning. Moreover, focus on the language may lead to the disregard, if not the neglect of other important aspects of a literary text—the point of view, author/reader relations, and historical and cultural knowledge which also inform the text (Carter and McRae 1996). The general trend of the recent approaches to the teaching of literature, especially to EFL/ESL students, seems to be the development of students' literary awareness to produce authentic and owned responses to the literary texts through their personal interaction with these. The emphasis is on learner autonomy, the acceptance of students' individual differences, especially with regard to their personal interpretations, responses, and preferences. (Sinclair in Carter and McRae). There is thus much concern for the use of more learner-centered and process-oriented approaches to help students learn to read and respond to texts independently.

But is this how literature is actually taught in the classrooms? The literature on

ESL has focused much on the second language learner. The rationale behind this is that knowledge of the process and causal factors in the acquisition of a second language will provide not only theoretical conclusions, but also practical applications to the field of language teaching. The emphasis on the learner, however, has caused the neglect of and disregard for the teachers and what they bring into the classroom. The concern with providing teachers with methods, techniques (and even ready-made lesson plans) has downplayed the role of the teachers, the decision-making process that they go through in interpreting classroom events and the influence these interpretations have on their teaching practices (Woods).

Much of the literature and studies talk about how literature should be taught in the classroom. A number of theses propose an integrated approach to the teaching of literature, i.e., interfacing language and literature and using language-based activities (e.g.,Vilches 1988, Santos 1992, Abao 1994, Que 1996, Gutierrez 1997, Pison 1997). The studies explain in great detail the underlying principles of the approach used and then present sample lesson plans which teachers can use or on which they can pattern their own lessons. But these do not deal with the teachers' cognition and what they bring into the classroom; rather, such studies merely recommend 'ready-made' solutions based on sound principles and theories for teachers' problems and woes, but do not consider what actually happens in the classroom and the important role that the teachers themselves play in solving these problems.

Over the years, however, the notion of teaching as a thinking activity has been emphasized. According to Calderhead, interest in teachers' thinking is a response to the behaviorist approaches to the study of thinking in the 1970s. Because these approaches view learning as habit formation, teaching then is regarded as simply a "mastering of a series of effective teaching behaviors" (Richards 65). Wallace calls this the *Craft model* of professional education—where the "expertise in the craft is passed on" (6) from the mentor who demonstrates to the novice what should be done, while the latter imitates and follows the former's instructions and advice.

Approaches that view teaching as a thinking activity, on the other hand, see learning as residing in the learners, not in the reinforcement or stimulus they are given. Likewise, teaching is not simply a result of a mastery of particular principles and theories but rather an outcome of what teachers develop and decide on using their specialist knowledge (Richards 65).

Good teaching, therefore, is not simply a result of a mastery of particular principles and theories that have been determined by others and by research. Good teaching is also

about creating a personal and practical theory of teaching (Richards). It is about teachers' capacity to conceptualize their own work and understand the processes and underlying principles that inform these decisions.

Interest thus shifted from publicly observable behaviors—those that can be objectively perceived, recorded, and measured - to states of consciousness, thinking, concept formation, or the acquisition of knowledge (Brown). In the field of education, the thrust has focused on discovering underlying motivations and deeper structures of teaching. Of utmost importance is going beyond the descriptive to the explanatory level of teaching, the end goal of which is teacher development. Understanding the nature of teaching and its underlying principles will help teachers evaluate their own development as teachers, at the same time determine what aspects of their teaching need changing.

An important aspect of this focus on teaching as a thinking activity is critical reflection (Richards) or reflective teaching (Bennett). Critical reflection or reflective teaching involves studying teaching experiences, values, beliefs, knowledge as a basis for evaluation and decision-making, and eventually as a source of change. Moreover, this includes examining the how and why of things and the value systems these represent (Richards).

The main goal, therefore, of critical reflection is teacher development. Teachers who understand the nature of their teaching and its underlying principles are in a better position to evaluate their own development as teachers, at the same time determine what aspects of their teaching need changing.

Central to understanding teacher cognition is articulating teacher beliefs. Teachers' beliefs systems influence what they do inside the classroom. These beliefs shape their decision-making, and thus constitute what is called their "culture of teaching" (Richards and Lockhart 30). To understand teachers' instructional practice and decision-making, it is necessary to study their beliefs and thinking processes.

Pajares discusses the problems with defining and understanding *beliefs* and *beliefs systems*. He notes that "the difficulty in studying teachers' beliefs has been caused by definitional problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and beliefs structures" (307). Although Pajares does not offer a comprehensive definition of beliefs, he nevertheless synthesizes how different studies have defined beliefs and then enumerates some assumptions researchers can start with when studying teachers' educational beliefs.

Pajares presents the attempts made to distinguish between *beliefs* and *personal/ practical knowledge*—a distinction that was difficult to make because different words were used to actually mean the same thing. Some authors define knowledge as referring to a

"structure composed of a cognitive component, possessing elements of evaluation and judgment" (Nisbett and Ross). Nespor, on the other hand, asserts that beliefs refer to the personal and ideal, with stronger affective and evaluative components than knowledge. Rokeach, however, argues that knowledge is subsumed as a component of belief. He defines beliefs as having a "cognitive component representing knowledge, and affective component capable of arousing emotion and a behavioral component activated when action is required" (Rokeach in Pajares 314).

Likewise, Richards and Lockhart identify *educationally based or research-based principles and principles derived from an approach or method* (knowledge) as sources of teachers' beliefs, together with teachers' *own experience as learners, experience of what works best, established practice* and *personality factors* (30-1).

I use the term *beliefs* to refer to cognitive, affective, and behavioral components that influence one's perceptions and judgments—a description I culled from Rokeach and Richards and Lockhart. In order to understand why literature teachers teach literature the way they do, it is necessary to uncover their beliefs about literature, learning, and teaching.

THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERPLAY

We all have a beliefs systems made up of information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions amassed from different origins. These beliefs influence our perceptions and judgments—and become the lens through which we interpret and view events and make decisions.

In the same way, what occurs in the classroom (instructional practice)—what activities teachers give their students (tasks), how teachers choose to interact with their students (discourse), and even what classroom set-up (learning environment) teachers use—is a product of decisions teachers have to make (see figure 1).
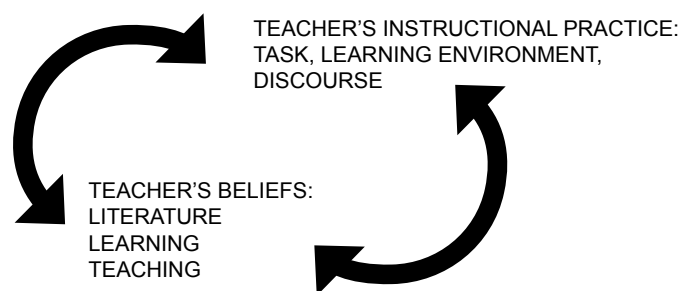

Fig. 1. *The Interplay of beliefs and instructional practice*

In teaching literature, teachers' beliefs about literature, learning, and teaching constitute the foundation of their instructional practice. The tasks, learning environment, and classroom discourse are all influenced by teachers' beliefs. In particular, their beliefs about literature determine the materials they use in the classroom; their beliefs about learning affect the way they assume the materials should be taught; and their beliefs about teaching shape how they organize classroom activities so that learning will take place (Woods).

THE STUDY ON TEACHER COGNITION

The larger work on which this paper is based uses the case study approach and the ethnographic method of observing the behavior and practices of a group of people from a particular culture. I studied the "culture," i.e., instructional practice and decision-making process of literature teachers[4] in secondary schools in Metro Manila to generate a "theory," i.e., the relationship among their beliefs, instructional practice, and decision-making process based on a detailed study of their cases.

In analyzing the data, I started with set categories which I synthesized from previous studies. I found myself, however, veering away from these categories as the research progressed since my findings seemed to resist categorization; my data did not yield clear-cut categories and classifications.

The nature of the focus of my study (teacher beliefs) necessitated intensive, rather than extensive, data gathering and analysis. I needed to establish a pattern in the teacher's instructional practice that might not have been easily inferred from one classroom observation and one interview, thus the need for me to gather data repeatedly over a long period. Data analysis took so much time as patterns and categories (and eventually beliefs) had to be inferred from lesson transcripts, observation notes, interview transcripts, notes, and plans. Moreover, I found myself going back to the data for verification even after patterns had already emerged from my analysis.

Data presented here were obtained from a teacher of a private secondary school in Metro Manila. I shall refer to her as Cynthia. The teacher was not screened based on her methodological preference, as one of the aims of my study is to find out what methodology is used in the teaching of literature.

Prior to the classroom observations, the teacher was interviewed (audio recorded) to elicit her views about herself as a teacher, her beliefs about literature, learning, and teaching. Following Woods' approach, I used interview questions that elicited

anecdotes, as beliefs articulated in stories are more likely to be based on actual behavior. I then videotaped four sessions of her classes (lasting approximately 190 minutes). The notes taken from viewing these sessions included time, a running account of what was happening in the lessons, and movements of the teachers.

Analysis of data was an in-depth description, analysis, and interpretation of the observation data (lesson transcripts, notes, lesson itself) and interview data. Data analysis consisted of three stages: the description of the instructional practice of the teacher; the abstraction of the teacher's underlying beliefs about literature, learning and teaching; and the discussion of the interplay of the beliefs and practices of the teachers.

Initial analysis entailed a search through recorded observed lessons, observation notes, and lesson transcripts in order to obtain an over-all understanding of the lesson framework (tasks, learning environment, and discourse) and decision-making process. I used the Lesson Dimensions and Dimension Indicators that Artzt and Armour-Thomas utilized in their study to guide me in describing the teachers' instructional practice (See Table 1).

Because the original descriptions contained in Artzt and Armour-Thomas were specific to mathematics, I added and modified a number of items culled from different sources to make them more applicable to the literature classroom: Richards and Nunan's *Classroom Management* and *Task Analysis* Forms, *Cole, O. and L. Chan (1994),* Brown's *Teacher Observation Forms* (A & B), and Gillen, Brown, and Williams' *Rating Form for Evaluation of a Science Demonstration* in Freiberg and Driscoll.

Table 1. Lesson Dimensions and Dimension Indicators

Dimensions	Description of Dimension Indicators
TASKS	
Modes of Representation	• Provides such representations as symbols, diagrams, charts, etc. to facilitate content clarity • Provides multiple representations that enable students to connect prior knowledge and skills to new knowledge • Uses balanced and varied activities during the lesson • Uses appropriate examples and illustrations effectively • Uses instructional aids and resource material effectively

Nature of Learning Activities	• Assigns work tasks that involve students in a broad range of cognitive and practical activities • Includes both new content and review material on work tasks • Sets work tasks that allow students to generalize or transfer their knowledge to practical problems
Motivational Strategies	• Provides tasks that capture students' curiosity and inspires them to speculate and to pursue their conjectures • Utilizes tasks that contain game-like features that make them more like recreational activities rather than academic activities • Provides challenging, novel and varied learning activities and experiences to motivate students to high levels of achievement • Takes into account the diversity of students' interests and experiences • Involves a finished product for display or use • Provides opportunities for students to interact with peers
Level of Difficulty/ Sequencing	• Sequences tasks such that students can progress in their cumulative understanding of a particular content area and can make connections among ideas learned in the past to those they will learn in the future • Uses tasks that are suitable to what the students already know and can do and what they need to learn or improve on • Presents material at the students' level of comprehension • Uses materials that are challenging but not threatening

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	
Social/Intellectual Climate	• Establishes and maintains a positive rapport with and among students by showing respect for and valuing students' ideas and ways of thinking • Establishes an atmosphere where the class feels free to ask questions, disagree, or to express their own ideas • Enforces classroom rules and procedures to ensure appropriate classroom behavior • Gives equal attention to all students and does not favor some at the expense of others • Stimulates students to think of alternative means of achieving stated goals • Devises cooperative learning activities in the classroom

Modes of Instruction/ pacing	• Uses instructional strategies that encourage and support students' involvement as well as facilitate goal attainment • Explains materials in an understandable way • Provides and structures the time necessary for students to express themselves and explore ideas • Uses method/s appropriate to the age and ability of students • Gives students "thinking time" to organize their thoughts and plan what they are going to say or do
Administrative Routines	• Uses effective procedures for organization and management of the classroom so that time is maximized for students' active involvement in the discourse and tasks • Gives clear guidelines and precise directions that students are able to carry them out to complete work tasks • Controls and directs class • Organizes the students into learning groups appropriate to the goals of the lesson • Encourages students to finish tasks within a set time • Organizes a classroom programme that has a minimum of disruptions and delays

DISCOURSE	
Teacher-student interaction	• Communicates with students in a non-judgmental manner and encourages participation of each student • Requires students to give full explanations and justifications or demonstrations orally and/or in writing • Listens carefully to students' ideas and makes appropriate decisions regarding when to offer information, when to provide clarification, when to model, when to lead and when to let students grapple with difficulties • Answers questions carefully and satisfactorily • Knows when the students are having trouble understanding • Gives appropriate feedback to student responses
Student-student interaction	• Encourages students to listen to, respond to and question each other so that they can evaluate and, if necessary, discard or revise ideas and take full responsibility for arriving at conjectures/conclusions • Encourages students to cooperate and share information with others

Questioning	• Poses a variety of levels and types of questions. • Asks probing questions to stimulate students to develop ideas, concepts and principles • Asks questions that are ordered from easy to difficult and arranged in a logical sequence • Ensures that the wording of questions is direct and clear • Allows appropriate wait times for students to answer. • Rephrases questions if students' answers indicate misunderstandings
Feedback Giving	• Provides explicit and unambiguous feedback • Addresses feedback directly at students' task performance and not at personal qualities of students who have completed the task

The framework consists of three parts—the TASKS that the teacher gives, the LEARNING ENVIRONMENT that exists in the classroom, as well as the DISCOURSE that exists between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves.

For the purposes of this study, I define tasks as referring to activities teachers use to achieve the learning goals they have set for the particular lesson (Richards and Nunan). Learning environment refers to the context or conditions where the teaching-learning process occurs. It includes the type of interpersonal interactions that exist between and among teachers and students, as well as mechanisms for time allotment and circumstances that affect classroom events. Discourse refers to the verbal exchanges that take place between and among teachers and students.

THE CASE STUDY

In my first interview with Cynthia, I asked her about her experiences in studying and teaching literature. From this interview, I abstracted Cynthia's conceptions of literature, teaching, and learning which are summarized by the following statements:

Through Literature, teachers can teach students about values and what it is to be "human." Teaching therefore, does not merely involve content presentation, but also character formation.

Literature teaching involves an understanding not only of the plot and setting, but

also of the other elements which are also as important. There is a need, however, to start with establishing students' basic understanding of the literary text.

Good teaching involves making students see the relevance, i.e., practicality and applicability to the outside world, of what they had been taught in the classroom.

Students learn best when they themselves discover what needs to be learned. It therefore becomes necessary that teachers equip their students with critical thinking skills.

Students come to class with their own schema of interests, knowledge, skills, and capabilities. The teacher needs to tap into and develop these, in order for more learning to occur inside the classroom.

The lessons I observed revolved around particular scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. The first session is a discussion of the character of Romeo, specifically after he had learned of his punishment for killing Tybalt. In the second session, the students listened to an audiotape of Act 3 Scene 5, and they were instructed to choose a particular character to profile—by noting down the language used and the tone and emotions revealed by the dialogues. These became the basis for the symbolism activity which the students worked on afterwards and then presented in the following meeting (Session 3). Session 4 is a recap of the highlights of Acts 1-3, events which the students referred to in Session 5 when they were brainstorming on the different types of love found in *Romeo and Juliet.* After the brainstorming activity, the students wrote an illustration essay about a type of love found in the play, using examples from the text, as well as from personal experience.

The task-based framework that Cynthia's syllabus is based on has an underlying coherence: all activities are conceptual and linguistic preparations for students to accomplish the final task. In this lesson, the final task is to write an illustration essay about a type of love found in *Romeo and Juliet*. According to the framework, all the activities done prior to this final task will equip the students with the content (types of love exemplified by the characters in *Romeo and Juliet*) and language skills (exercises and activities geared towards writing an illustration essay) necessary for them to accomplish the final task.

A look at Cynthia's class reveals that she uses learning activities that really involve the students. Such activities entail them to apply what they have learned both recently and previously. For example, by asking the students to include actual experience (personal

or a friend's) as example to the type of love discussed in the illustration essay (Session 5), the teacher is able to capture students' interest and, at the same time, challenge them to go beyond what the text reveals, and thus find its relevance to real life. Moreover, these activities allow students to interact, if not collaborate, with their peers.

Much of classroom interaction, though, is still teacher-led discussion. Although the teacher merely asks the guide questions, and the answers still come from the students themselves, very few students get to participate in such a set-up. For example in Session 1, after the dramatic reading of Scene 3 by selected students, the teacher asks the students to identify the solution proposed by the different characters and then give an adjective that will describe each of these characters. As students give their answers, the teacher maps them out on the board. Only around 18 out of a class of 30-35 students participated in the discussion.

In addition, the questions Cynthia poses ask for answers that are mostly based on the text. She often starts with basic plot questions and follows these up with "Why?" or "Justify your answer." However, no synthetic/evaluative questions, i.e., questions that go beyond the text, are asked. As a whole, though, the teacher's questions are direct and clearly worded. She often rephrases questions even before students try to answer, probably to give students more time to think about their answers.

The learning environment in the class is characterized by respect: Cynthia asks for and accepts students' responses and encourages them to ask questions as well. Often the teacher will ask her students, "What do you think?" or "What would you do?" to elicit a response from them. She calls on everyone and does not seem to favor any student in particular. She will always say, "Other hands?" or "I haven't heard from…" to get everyone in class to recite.

Activities are as well managed as the discussions. The teacher gives clear instructions, often writes them on the board and informs the students how much time they have to accomplish the activity. Often she says, "At the count of five, return to your proper places…" or "All papers should be in…."

She utilizes strategies such as BUZZ sessions to her and her students' advantage since these maximize their understanding of the lesson. For example, when students start discussing among themselves, the teacher turns the noise this creates into a productive endeavor by letting them "buzz" for about a minute or two, and then asking them to share with the bigger group what they have "buzzed" about (Sessions 1 and 5).

Cynthia encourages students to participate by saying, "I haven't heard from…" or "I'm interested to know what you think…." She makes it clear, though, that students have

to justify their answers, often by asking them to cite specific lines from the text that they are studying.

Cynthia generally directs feedback at the students' performance or answer, and not at the personal quality of students. She often responds with "Ok," "Correct," "That's a possibility," or "That's one way of looking at it." When the teacher gave feedback to the students who did the dramatic reading, she said, "Of course, their emotions can still be improved upon," implying that she was not quite happy with the group's performance, yet at the same time not directly putting the students down.

UNDERLYING BELIEFS ABOUT LITERATURE, LEARNING, AND TEACHING

Cynthia's instructional practice reveals that she regards literature as an "artifact" to be studied for its timeless and universal truths and values. A look at the nature of most of the activities that Cynthia prepared for and did in class shows that these all intend to help students gain a better understanding of the text that they are studying. They are all geared towards content clarification, comprehension, and interpretation so that students will be able to "unearth" the meaning, i.e., values, traditions, and truths embedded in the text.

Plot clarification (Session 2) before the symbolism activity is concerned with the "what happens," or the sequence of events. All the other activities—paraphrasing of lines, the recaps and reviews, even the quizzes, ensure students' understanding of the "basics" of the text. Because knowing the "what" will make it easier for the students to know the "why," i.e., interpret not only the events but also the actions of the characters.

In the end, such practice will bring the students to a better understanding of what life is about by allowing them to see how the text is related and relevant to their own lives. The final task thus brings all of these together. Students are asked to write about a type of love exemplified in *Romeo and Juliet*, citing not only specific events in the text, but also personal or vicarious experience.

An analysis of the teaching practice of Cynthia exhibits a basically cognitive-constructivist view of learning. That is, she believes that students are actively involved in the process of learning. Learners are thus expected to have active roles—they are responsible for their own learning.

Students learn when they themselves deal with the literary text—read it, answer exercises about it, talk about it, and accomplish activities on it. The dramatic reading of the scenes and listening to the audio tape of the scene are ways of making the text accessible to

students—a necessary step prior to "processing" it. The charts and diagrams the teacher gives to students enable them to investigate and try to understand it.

The teacher engages them in discussions about the text, carefully constructing her questions so that through this process, students will be able to construct their knowledge of the text, i.e., understand and learn it. When the teacher asks questions that clarify the plot, the players, and some particular scenes, she merely wants to assist her students in processing the new information. This is why Cynthia is careful that she does not spoon feed her students. This is also one of the reasons why she persists with the questioning of a student—so that he himself, with the guidance of the teacher, will discover the answer.

Also evident in Cynthia's classroom practice and decisions is her belief that learning is an emotional experience. Thus, a learner with the 'right" attitude, interests, and motivation will likely be more successful in learning. This is why Cynthia deliberately chooses her activities and journal topics and makes sure she uses a variety of them. Using the same activities over and over again may dampen students' interests and thus de-motivate them. Moreover, by using different activities, she shows awareness of the different learning styles of students —that there are some who learn best when they analyze, while there are others who learn more by interacting and communicating with their peers.

Cynthia's teaching approach is basically learner-centered and learning centered. An analysis of the activities she planned and executed in class shows that these really involve the students and entail them to apply what they have learned. The symbolism activity allowed students to explore their knowledge of the things around them and find a conceptual, if not thematic link between these and the characters in the text. The fact that this was done in small groups ensured maximum participation of the students. In such a classroom set-up, the teacher basically takes on the role of an organizer and a guide —setting up tasks and activities, and assisting and leading the learners in accomplishing these tasks.

The nature of these activities and classroom events reveals that the teacher also aims to develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills of students. Character analysis, paraphrasing, looking for justifications—these are means of training the mind to establish relationships between concepts, and thus allow students to construct knowledge.

However, the teacher still has too much control of the class. Much of classroom interaction is still teacher-led discussion, and the participation of the students is limited to answering the questions that she posed. Although the answers still come from the students themselves, very few students get to participate in such a set-up. When such discussions are done to prepare the students for the following activity, the teacher's concern is really

about the time that plenary discussion will save (as opposed to having the students discuss these among themselves), which will then translate to more time for the main activity.

Cynthia's professed beliefs were consistent with her instructional practice. The focus of her discussion of literary texts and the nature of the activities she gives in class are consistent with her view that literature embodies a meaning, value, or truth that students need to primarily understand in order for them to see its relevance in their own lives. She probably guides the students through a thorough understanding of the "players," i.e., characters of the text in order for them to see that the characters can be like them, and that what the characters have gone through may be similar to what real people go through. Thus, by studying the literary texts, students actually gain a deeper understanding of what it is to be "human", and of life itself.

Cynthia's belief that learning is discovering is also reflected in her instructional practice. Several times, Cynthia said that she takes care that she does not spoon-feed her students. This is apparent in her use of the Socratic method (through which she patiently leads the students to the discovery of the answers), and in the classroom tasks and activities that she gives in class. These are mostly "thinking" and "gap" activities, i.e. activities that allow the students to be creative and independent learners. Her use of the discovery method may also be attributed to the fact that she handles a semi-honors' class, which is basically composed of bright students. Such students need to be challenged to think, and gapped exercises address this need.

With such a view of learning, it becomes clear why she engages her students in a number of pair and small group work activities. Cynthia does not see herself as the only source of knowledge in the classroom; the students themselves are vital contributors, thus the opportunities she gives them to participate in the learning process.

Cynthia's definition of "learning by discovering," however, does not seem to include a wider range of questions. An analysis of the questions she asked in class reveals that she asked more questions that require text-based answers than those that require evaluative, synthetic thinking. It is possible that this lack of awareness of the taxonomies of questions may be due to the fact that Cynthia is not an Education major, but a Philosophy graduate.

Once or twice, Cynthia expressed her belief that teaching also involves character formation. Thus, the teacher needs to nurture her students by respecting their individuality and recognizing each of their potentials. This humanist view of learning is reflected in Cynthia's instructional practice as well. That she tries to call on everyone in class, responds to students' answers, and includes presentation of output reflect her understanding of students' need to be recognized and affirmed.

Cynthia attributes this practice to her experience with her college teacher. She knew how it felt to be appreciated and recognized, thus her vow to do the same with her students. Moreover, the school she works for values *cura personalis* (personal care). In such an environment, teachers are encouraged to go beyond their duties as mere educators whose primary concern is to inculcate knowledge in their students and to attend to the development of the total human person in their students, including their emotional well-being.

CONCLUSION

> There is no such thing as good teaching. There are only good teachers… In other words, teaching is realized only in teachers; it has no independent existence.
>
> <div align="right">- Richards, Beyond Training:
Perspectives in Language Teaching Education.</div>

The experience of Cynthia validates what researchers have long expressed—that the teachers' instructional practice and decision-making process are shaped by their beliefs system. Several researches have already suggested the importance of teachers' awareness of their own beliefs system —teachers who understand the cognition underlying their teaching practice and decision-making process are in a better position to evaluate their own development as teachers. As such, they can determine what aspects of their teaching need changing.

Research on teacher cognition has brought the focus back to the teachers—who are as essential to the learning process as the learners themselves. This time, however, the deed is not distinct from the doer, but rather, the deed is, at times the doer. Teaching reveals so much about the teachers—their knowledge, values, and experiences—that it will be remiss of us to think otherwise. Studying the teacher and her teaching uncovers a number of assumptions and conceptions that might already need challenging and changing.

However, this study of teacher cognition should be done in the context of reflective teaching practice. Insights from research on teacher cognition, therefore, will not just enrich the field of teacher education, but more importantly, eventually empower the teachers to look to themselves for answers to their teaching woes. Seen in this light, therefore, reflective teaching is a "hopeful activity" (Brookfield xiii). It essentially assumes that teachers *do* want to be better and more effective teachers.

<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1   Editors' Note: On August 2001, Republic Act 9155 or Governance of Basic Education Act transformed the name Department of Education, Culture and Sports or DECS to Department of Education or DepEd.

2   Both public and private secondary schools base their own curricula on this.

3   This paper is part of a larger study that examined how four literature teachers' beliefs about literature, learning, and teaching influence their instructional practice and decision-making process. I do not claim, however, that my findings in this study can be used to make generalizations on the practice of literature teaching in secondary schools. What it does is simply describe the practice of four literature teachers, as this can provide insights in the study of teacher cognition, as well as the teaching of English in the country.

4   Data for the entire study were obtained from teachers of four different private and public secondary schools in Metro Manila. Out of the seven School Principals within Metro Manila I sent letters to, only five responded positively. I considered only the schools within Metro Manila for practical reasons. I had to consider that I would be going to these schools for a week (and possibly one school after another) in order to videotape the classes of the teachers. I initially wanted one teacher per year level per school as participants. However, I did not have control over which teachers were willing to work with me in my research. In the end, I decided on just four schools—two private and two public schools and whoever were willing to participate.

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