Teaching Second Language Acquisition Courses: Views from New Faculty

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Abstract

Second language acquisition (SLA) courses are a perennial feature of graduate level teacher preparation programs in Applied Linguistics and TESOL. While there has been recent interest in exploring the interfaces of second language acquisition research and classroom teaching (Ellis, 1997), the teaching of SLA courses at the university level is little studied. This report describes a faculty-initiated self reflection and development program done by two new U.S.- and Japan-based graduate faculty teaching SLA for the first time. The authors' responses to a written interview protocol, analyzed using Shulman's (1986, 1987) pedagogical reasoning model, revealed the challenges they faced and also the strategies they employed in teaching SLA content to M.A. students. The authors argue for a greater awareness of faculty development in TESOL and applied linguistics, and a new view of SLA teachers and students as stakeholders in SLA.

Introduction

Despite a strong research agenda on alternative modes of instruction in language teaching, university faculty in TESOL and applied linguistics continue to rely on traditional "lectures and large group teaching" in second language teacher preparation courses (Richards, 1998, p. 16). This suggests that an exploration of the teaching of university faculty in TESOL and applied linguistics courses should be undertaken for a number of reasons. First, the literature suggests that faculty learning and development in TESOL and applied linguistics M.A. and certificate programs have been little studied (e.g., Bartels, 2002). Second, public accountability is increasing in many educational contexts; as a result, academe must learn to reward efforts to investigate and improve university teaching (Dinerman, Feldman, & Ello, 1999; The scholarship 'on' teaching, 2000; Wright, 1994). Third, there is a growing perception that current models of university faculty preparation and in-service development are inadequate (Dinerman et al., 1999; Eison & Stevens, 1994; Hativa, 2000; Richlin, 1994). Fourth, there has been a growing interest among some scholars in improving TESOL graduate and certificate programs (e.g., Ramanathan,

Davies, & Schleppegrell, 2001; Richards, 1998). For these reasons and more, studies that seek to understand faculty learning are likely to play a crucial role in understanding the beliefs that graduate level teachers bring to their profession, the types of knowledge they rely on, and how they make sense of their professional worlds. [-1-]

Purpose

While understanding that teaching and learning do not lend themselves to straightforward analyses, our initial purpose was to make sense of our first experiences teaching a specific course, second language acquisition (SLA). We wanted to develop ourselves as teachers of this content area, as we viewed it as a compelling field of study that we would likely be asked to teach repeatedly during our careers. However, as we carried out long distance, reciprocal peer interviews midway and at the end of our first semester teaching SLA, our purposes became more strongly centered around three propositions.

The first proposition is that pedagogical content knowledge, a content-specific teaching knowledge that has often been used to describe teaching at the primary and secondary school levels, can also be applied to other levels of education. We believe that pedagogical content knowledge has adequate conceptual power to characterize our weaknesses and strengths as instructors of a course new to us, and can be usefully applied to the interview data gathered in this study. If our experiences can be used to predict some of the fundamental issues that may confront new TESOL and applied linguistics faculty, then this information can be used to plan both formal and informal faculty development activities. Formal activities are those that have been devised by doctoral level faculty in charge of preparing new faculty or by those who hire new faculty and who have the stated purpose of preparing new faculty for their future teaching duties. Informal activities involve private efforts made by new faculty members themselves or doctoral level colleagues or supervisors to enhance the teaching skills of new faculty members. This report constitutes an account of an informal self-development project.

The second proposition is that pedagogical reasoning, a model proposing a process through which pedagogical content knowledge may be developed, can be used to illuminate the teaching development of university instructors. By documenting our initial experiences teaching SLA, engaging in reciprocal interviews and then reviewing the data in terms of the pedagogical reasoning model proposed by Shulman (1987), we found that the model shed light on how our instructional approaches were developing and helped us identify the triggers for the development of pedagogical content knowledge. A clearer understanding of these issues will assist us in defining the areas in which formal and informal efforts at faculty preparation and development may best be directed.

The third proposition is that long-distance peer interviews are an effective means of reflecting on graduate level teaching experiences and thus arriving at new comprehensions. We believe that all teachers are ultimately responsible for their own learning (Beglar, 1999; Gorsuch, 2000), whatever new courses they undertake to teach. We further believe that for a variety of reasons, prevailing models of university-level teacher preparation and development are not optimally effective, an opinion that is shared by many educational researchers (cf., Boice, 1987, 1992; Cox, 1994; Dinerman, Feldman & Ello, 1999; Eison & Stevens, 1994; Gorsuch, 2000; Qualter, 2000; Richlin, 1994; "The scholarship 'on' teaching," 2000; Trigwell, 1994; Wright, 1994). If we are not mistaken in this view, choosing an effective and relevant means of reflection becomes an important issue for new TESOL and applied linguistics instructors.

There are a number of possible responses to this assertion, and ours was to keep records of our teaching experiences, interview one another about those experiences, and use pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical reasoning as a lens through which to view those experiences. By engaging in this process, we developed a number of new comprehensions that we could directly apply to our future teaching. These comprehensions involved areas such as syllabus design, the selection of instructional materials, the development of course goals and more valid forms of student assessment, and the creation of effective, personal approaches to class preparation. By situating this concrete approach to self-development in the larger context, our long distance interviews can be seen as an example of the reflection stage of the pedagogical reasoning model and a door to our new comprehensions of a specific content area. [-2-]

Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Reasoning

Before continuing, we need to describe the twin frameworks within which this study is situated: pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical reasoning. These are closely related to a conception of teaching as a "meaning making activity" in which teachers seek solutions to actual and anticipated classroom situations (Breen, 1991, p. 231). Shulman comments on teachers' meaning making: "teaching necessarily begins with a teachers' understanding of what is to be learned and how it is to be taught" (1987, p. 7). The merging of content knowledge (*what* is to be learned) and pedagogy (*how* it is to be taught) has been termed pedagogical content knowledge (Chen & Ennis, 1995; Cochran, DeReuter, & King, 1993; Grenfell, 1998; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000), which has been characterized by Shulman (1987, p.

15) as: "the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful" and "most germane to its teachability" (1986, p. 9).

In addition to pedagogical content knowledge, pedagogical reasoning plays a key role in successful teaching. Pedagogical reasoning is the process by which teachers apply their pedagogical content knowledge of specific content to an actual teaching situation. Although this process is clearly central to all teaching, we would further argue that pedagogical reasoning is the process by which pedagogical content knowledge is developed. Through pedagogical reasoning and reflection, teachers may arrive at "new comprehensions" of "purposes, subject matter, students, teaching, and self" (Shulman, 1987, p. 15). Pedagogical reasoning, as explained by Shulman (p. 15), is a process which potentially has six stages: comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation, reflection, and new comprehensions (see Shulman, 1989, p. 19 for caveats on viewing pedagogical reasoning as a chronologically ordered six stage process). Some of these stages will be used as units of analysis of our peer interview data, and so will be discussed here.

Comprehension. Teachers generally begin with comprehension of the subject matter to be learned by the students. That teachers should have adequate knowledge of the content they teach is widely accepted in general education (Cochran, DeRuiter, & King, 1993; Elbaz, 1983; Kay, 1975; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; MacDonald & Rogan, 1990; Shulman, 1987; Tarvin & Faraj, 1990) and in TESOL teacher education (Johnson, 1999; Richards, 1998; Widdowson, 1997). More specifically, Shulman has proposed that teachers must have a multifaceted comprehension of "a set of ideas" (1987, p. 14) that they can relate to each other within a particular field and to other ideas outside the field. Thus, this constitutes a call for the development of a broad, multi-disciplinary, well-integrated knowledge base.

Transformation. The second stage of pedagogical reasoning is transformation of the subject matter to be taught, in which teachers move "from personal comprehension to preparing for the comprehension of others" (p. 16) and prepare content for the "minds and motivations of learners" (p. 16). Transformation of subject matter has four components, which we will use to characterize a teacher who has well-developed pedagogical content knowledge. The first component, preparation, requires teachers to engage in a learner-oriented interpretation of course texts, in our case, SLA textbooks, academic journal articles, and commentaries. Preparation thus involves teachers deciding which texts learners should interact with and for what particular purposes. For instance, SLA teachers might decide that learners would benefit from gaining knowledge of Universal Grammar (UG) and then select the texts students will be asked to read, texts that could range from straightforward introductory explanations of UG and its potential relationship to the nature/nurture debate to densely-written, technically-oriented texts that discuss UG as a language learning theory. Representation, the second component of transformation, requires teachers to think through "the key ideas in the text . . . and [identify] the alternative ways of representing them to students" (Shulman, 1987, p. 16). By engaging in representation, teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (p. 15) is manifested through their uses of "powerful analogies, illustrations, demonstrations, and examples," all designed to make a subject "comprehensible." For lessons on the Accessibility Hierarchy, this might involve isolating the concepts of relativization and markedness as most relevant to student comprehension, and then planning two or more explanations along with multiple linguistic examples of each concept.

A third component of transformation, selection of instruction, involves teachers selecting from a repertoire of teaching strategies through which to present their representations of the content to students (Shulman, 1987, p. 16). Again, for the Accessibility Hierarchy, SLA teachers may plan to present their explanations and examples through a lecture portraying the underlying concepts, or they may plan to provide small groups of students linguistic data and focus questions and have them embark on an inductive learning task. A fourth and final component of transformation, adaptation to student characteristics, involves teachers planning effectively for "aspects of student ability . . . motivation . . . or prior knowledge and skills" that may affect in some way their comprehension of the content (Shulman, 1987, p. 17). This also includes an awareness of what aspects of the content are likely to be easy or difficult to learn, and why (Shulman, 1986, p. 9; see also Chen & Ennis, 1995). [-3-]

The implication here is that instructors must able to predict students' noncomprehension of a topic, the reasons for the non-comprehension, and then be prepared to present alternative explanations or examples, or additional materials, tasks, or data samples for students to interact with so that they can arrive at an more adequate understanding. Through experience, for example, SLA instructors may be able to predict that many students in their program lack knowledge of linguistic terminology or concepts, and that this lack may account for difficulties in student comprehension of Universal Grammar as a language learning theory. Further, they may know from experience that abstract concepts such as parameter setting are particularly hard to grasp, particularly when the empirical evidence supporting the concept is ambiguous. They may then decide to precede lessons on UG with lessons, worksheets, or readings designed to define problematic concepts such as parameter setting. We agree with Shulman that transformation of content is the essence of pedagogical reasoning (1987, p. 16) and we further argue that it is a teacher's demonstrated facility in preparing and representing content, and planning instruction for specific learners, that is most associated with our conceptions of "good" teachers.

Instruction and evaluation. In the third stage of Shulman's model, instruction occurs when teachers apply their transformation of subject matter to the classroom in "observable forms of classroom teaching" (p. 15). This includes lectures, teacher-led interactive discussions, student-led discussions or presentations, small group tasks, and all other observable aspects of classroom management carried out by the teacher. Evaluation, the fourth stage, refers to teachers' evaluations of students' learning through informal observations and questioning in class, and formal assignments and tests. Evaluation also refers to teachers' judgments of their own teaching. Evaluation is being defined alongside instruction because teachers' evaluations of students' learning and their own teaching are necessarily mediated by instruction. This relationship became salient to us when we realized that one aspect of our instruction, our assignment of a literature review, was inadequate as a form of evaluation as it did not give us timely feedback on our students' ability to synthesize and apply their knowledge. Most students did not hand in the literature review until the end of the term, when it was too late to intervene and deal with the issues raised by their performances.

Reflection and new comprehensions. This study is an example of the fifth stage of pedagogical reasoning, reflection. Reflection differs from evaluation in that it is a more formal process and involves a conscious reenactment of teaching, with the aim of learning from the experience (Shulman, 1987, p. 19). In contrast, the process of evaluation may be reenactive and may result in powerful intuitions or emotional responses, but may not be detailed or clearly focused. Thus, teachers may not learn anything truly lasting or relevant from evaluation alone. For teacher learning to take place as a result of reflection, we argue that teachers need to record accounts of teaching events over time. Then the accounts must be analyzed for insights into specific issues.

As noted above, we evaluated our literature review assignments negatively; however, the specific reasons for this evaluation were open to discovery because we were able to examine our written and recorded teaching accounts for mentions of the literature review assignment, a step that revealed a number of reasons for our negative assessment. The final stage, new comprehensions, is concerned with the learning that teachers achieve through experience and then add to their pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987, p. 19). Although Shulman has asserted that reflection does not necessarily result in new comprehensions (p. 19), our experience with this study suggests that teachers are more likely to form new comprehensions if they engage in reflection. From our reflection on the literature review assignment, we concluded that students were generally unfamiliar with the literature review genre, frequently unable to select an appropriate topic, largely unfamiliar with what sources to consult to answer specific questions, and sometimes unable to find the resources they needed. These new, focused, specific comprehensions helped us revise the literature review assignment for future use.

A skilled instructor. Based on the twin frameworks of pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical reasoning, we are now in a position to propose a characterization of skilled SLA teachers. We will base our examples in SLA, as this is the subject we taught when we did this study. First, they must possess adequate pedagogical content knowledge that has been developed by surveying and comprehending a wide variety of SLA textbooks and academic articles and actively considering the relationships between them. Second, they critically interpret and prepare texts for students by selecting and segmenting appropriate texts into workable class meeting units. Third, they have an adequate repertoire of "analogies, metaphors, examples, demonstrations" and "explanations" (Shulman, 1987, p. 15) that can be used to represent, illuminate, and clarify content to students during classes, on-line discussions, and tutorials. Fourth, they command a repertoire of teaching strategies from which they plan activities and modes of presentation that promote students' learning. Importantly, they adapt their presentation of concepts to student ability, background, and interest levels, and for the purposes of teaching, they ground their comprehensions of the content in how they believe their students might misconceive the content. Finally, in the classroom, they are able to respond fairly spontaneously to student non-comprehension using alternative explanations and activities in order to provide new doorways through which students can enter the conceptual world of SLA. [-4-]

Research Questions

Following the three propositions stated above, our overall research questions are: How can our pedagogical content knowledge of SLA be characterized? How did we compare to the description of a skilled instructor offered above? Specifically:

1. What evidence is there that we comprehended texts and were able to prepare them for pedagogical purposes?
2. What evidence is there that we had a repertoire of concept representations and teaching strategies for SLA?
3. What evidence is there that we adapted our presentation of concepts to students' abilities, interests, and previous knowledge? And, how can our development as instructors be characterized? Specifically:
4. What areas of growth or change can be detected through our evaluation of and reflection on our instruction? What seem to be the major trigger points for change?

Method

Participants

In this section, we will outline our backgrounds relevant to this study in order to provide readers with a sense of our apprenticeship (e.g., Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Freeman, 1994; Freeman & Richards, 1993; Kennedy, 1989; Lortie, 1975). We believe this description is necessary to understanding our initial images of what graduate classes should look like, how they should be conducted, what our roles as teachers should be, what materials students should interact with, and how students' learning should be assessed. We will also briefly describe the SLA classes we taught. We would like to state here that in describing our backgrounds we do not intend to ascribe responsibility to anyone but ourselves for what we are and were, strong or weak as we were as instructors of a course new to us.

Greta had an M.A.T. in TESOL degree, with courses on teaching methods and culture. She also took courses on discourse analysis, the history of English, phonology, functional grammar, and language testing during the interim between her M.A.T. and Ed. D. David had an M. Ed. degree in TESOL, which included courses such as teaching methodology, pedagogical grammar, the sound system of English, the history of English, and quantitative research methodology. David and Greta attended the same doctoral program in an overseas branch campus of an American university (although in two different geographic cohorts), took courses from the same teachers on the same topics such as research methodology, statistics, the analysis of spoken discourse, curriculum design, research in second language reading and writing, computer assisted language learning, first and second language listening research, and advanced issues in testing. Courses were taught through lectures, and student presentations and group discussions. Course requirements consisted of extensive reading of both textbooks and research articles, midterm and final tests, and final papers reporting on original data-driven research. We were both experienced EFL teachers at the time we did this study, with an accumulated 32 years of experience between us. By the time we began the study, we had taught a few semesters of graduate level courses such as teaching methods and language testing. [-5-]

SLA learning experiences.

Greta had had a one-credit SLA course in the late 1980s, and in the early 1990s she audited a three-credit course. Both courses were lecture-based surveys of the early development of SLA as a field, and reviews of past and then-current theoretical studies. The lecturers' styles for both courses were abstract and based in the academic discourse of the class readings. During her doctoral studies, Greta researched the acquisition of suprasegmental aspects of English pronunciation, and the effects of educational policy on teachers. David took two one-credit seminars on SLA in addition to a three-credit course in the late 1980s, which included reading a mainstream textbook and journal articles. The lecturer closely followed the main course text. David approached the course paper requirement by conducting an original data driven project on syntactic constraints on code-switching, an experience that triggered David's subsequent and sustained interest in SLA research. David shaped his research towards lexical acquisition and language testing.

Authors' initial SLA teaching.

Greta taught her initial three-credit SLA course in Spring, 2000 at a medium-sized university in the U.S. The ten students were M.A. students in applied linguistics, German, English literature, and interdisciplinary studies. They ranged in age from 22 to 39. There were four males and six females. Three were native English speakers, one was a bilingual Spanish/English speaker, one was a trilingual English/German/Russian speaker, one was a native speaker of Portuguese, one was a native speaker of Russian, one was a native Mandarin speaker, and two were native speakers of Japanese. Two of the students were nearing the end of their academic degree programs, four were midway through, and four were taking the course in their first semester of study. With one exception, the students had no previous courses in linguistics. All but two of the students were teaching ESL, German, Japanese, English composition, or Spanish in public schools or universities. The main textbook used in the course was *Second Language Acquisition,* by Gass and Selinker (1994).

David initially taught a three-credit SLA course to two groups of M.Ed. students at the same
university in Japan. One class, held in central Japan, had 13 students and the other class, held in western Japan, had 22 students. The students in both classes ranged in age from 26 to 46. David's students were from Japan, the U.S., Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Ireland. As most of the students were part- or full-time teachers, classes were held in the evenings and on weekends to accommodate their work schedules. While there was no policy requiring students to do so, they were strongly advised to delay taking the SLA course until near the end of their degree programs (and just before an arduous comprehensive examination). As a result, the vast majority of students had earned at least 21 graduate credits and had been introduced to many of the concepts that formed the core of the SLA course. In addition, the students were strongly motivated to learn the material because of a perception that the SLA course content formed a large part of the comprehensive exam.

Materials

The data elicitation instrument was a written interview (see Appendix). The items were written in response to two general questions we posed at the beginning of the study: "What challenges are we facing in teaching this course content for the first time?" and "How are we responding to these challenges?" These questions helped us generate more specific questions, and a log that Greta had kept from the first week of her SLA course suggested additional questions. The interview protocol was finalized a third of the way through the semester. We then spent the semester answering the questions, and then exchanged our answers by ordinary mail for comment at the end of the semester.

Analysis

To answer our research questions, we categorized our responses according to the six stages of pedagogical reasoning suggested by Shulman (1987): comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation, reflection, and new comprehensions. We scrutinized the data we had categorized under "transformation" and further categorized them under the four components of transformation detailed above: preparation, representation, selection, and adaptation. We categorized the data independently and then compared our categorizations. Differences were resolved through discussion. [-6-]

Results

RQ #1: Comprehension and preparation of SLA texts. The data suggest that at the outset of our teaching the course, our levels of comprehension of SLA content were different, and that this resulted in different styles of preparation for teaching. Greta's comprehension of SLA texts was not as broad or deep as David's. Greta was familiar with SLA theories in an implicit sense, and she was familiar with the general themes of seminal SLA research and the names associated with them. Because she had done research on acquisition of suprasegmentals, she had an explicit understanding of speech processing theory, age constraints, etc. However, she did not have an explicit, multifaceted understanding of the theories and concepts embodied in the whole range of research being done. Thus, it was not clear to her how the various areas of SLA research (e.g., variability, cognitive processing, etc.) related to each other. The features of Greta's comprehension of SLA content had profound effects on her preparation of texts for the course. Her lack of explicit, global familiarity with a range of texts had several interrelated effects: First, it was difficult for her to know which SLA topics should be introduced in the course, and how much time should be devoted to them. She had tried to locate other teachers' syllabuses but failed to do so in time for the course (SLA had only been taught once before in her program, several years earlier). She came to depend on the implicit syllabus of the textbook she selected but found as the course progressed that this was inadequate for determining which topic would be covered during a specific class meeting. Second, although she was able to prepare on a week-by-week basis by reading the textbook and related articles intensively, she found that the depth and scope of her lessons were strongly bound to the text. Towards the end of the course, Greta ran out of time before chapters on more recent psycholinguistic research could be covered and spent more time than needed on earlier concepts such as contrastive analysis and behaviorism.

Third, she could not reconcile her course goals with SLA research reports. Her goals were for the students to "form an interest in a specific area of SLA" and to look "for opportunities where they might collect some data in response to the issue they became interested in." Also, she "wanted students to have a general familiarity with the field so they could read future research" and "to be able to articulate their interests, and articulate SLA concepts for their own benefit and for the benefit of others." While these goals resulted in the creation of activities and assignments for students, Greta could not effectively select articles for students to read on the basis of the goals. She did not know which reports would most effectively serve students' developing interests on specific topics.

David had a broader and deeper comprehension of SLA textbooks and research reports. He states, "When I started my doctoral studies, I bought Rod Ellis' book (1994) which had just come out (this was 1995) and I began reading it in preparation for the SLA course or courses which I thought I would have to take as part of my coursework." David conducted research on vocabulary acquisition, and through experience reading "dense, lengthy, conceptually difficult articles" in the fields of cognitive psychology and first language acquisition he found SLA articles "generally not hard to get through."

David's comprehension of SLA content was enough to give him a grasp of the "larger world of research in which we find UG positions, interface and non-interface positions, sociolinguistic positions, cognitive orientations, and so on." Further, he was aware that he had less depth of explicit knowledge in some areas and that he moved "the course to areas that I was more familiar with." David felt the least knowledgeable about sociolinguistic perspectives, a difficulty that contributed to his sense of frustration that arose from his largely unsuccessful attempts to relate the different areas of SLA to one another in his own mind. On one hand, he felt that the field was

fragmented, but that perhaps one should not attempt to integrate these areas: "Managing to make strong connections between different areas might mean I've simplified the field too much."

Two factors strongly enhanced David's preparation of texts for his course: His comprehension of a range of SLA texts, and a strong grasp of the time constraints imposed by the course. David relied on his comprehension of texts to select suitable textbooks for his course. He rejected one textbook when he realized he would be unable to get many of the research reports mentioned in it. Without them, he thought students might have difficulty understanding concepts presented in the textbook. David's preparation of texts for students was not as strongly tied to the main textbook he chose. He also integrated supplementary research reports and textbooks with the topics he had decided to cover. By the time the course was over, he had 10 textbooks and 63 research reports and articles on reserve, covering 11 of the 14 topics he intended to teach. The topics and texts that David chose were integrated with his main goal, which was to "provide a survey of SLA research to illuminate principal factors underlying L2 learning of adults." [-7-]

David knew that he would meet with students fourteen times during the course. He prepared for the course by writing fourteen original literature reviews, which required him to read intensively on specific topics. He applied the criteria of recency and applicability to the classroom to studies he read to prepare his literature reviews. Although the process was time consuming and stressful, it was ultimately useful as it forced David to read the literature in breadth and depth and it informed his choices of which texts to include in the course reading packet. Notwithstanding access to syllabuses and reading packets put together by two previous instructors of the course, David wrote the syllabuses based on his own comprehension of the field and his views of which theories and concepts were most important.

RQ #2: Representations and selection of instruction. Creating relevant, comprehensible, convincing, and timely representations of SLA content for students was a singularly painful challenge for both Greta and David. Greta found that she was unable to anticipate every question students would have (e.g., "But how can something in a language be 'impossible'? Can't any combinations or words or sounds be used to communicate, if everyone comes to share an understanding of them?" "But what is a pro-drop?" "I don't get this parameter thing at all. What's an example, and how would the sentence change if the learner's parameter were reset?"), but that nonetheless she was required to think of metaphors, explanations, and examples under real time pressure in the classroom in order to answer students' questions, or in response to students' non-comprehension. Even with David's more in-depth comprehension of content, he found that:

> *I had to re-explain some difficult concepts several times at the request of students and each time I tried to come up with new examples or a different metaphor (since the previous ones had apparently not worked). This was sometimes very difficult to do and I had to think quite hard in order to do it.*

The ability to create effective and compelling representations for students was essential, not only to explain content and to respond to student questions, but to motivate students to wrestle with abstract concepts, such as language universals, competition, markedness, or restructuring over the course of the 14-week semester. Ultimately, the degree of abstraction inherent in the course content seemed to create problems. David states:

> *[A] primary problem which arose as the class went on was a drop off in the energy level . . . I was making a conscious effort to keep the class interesting by using concrete examples to illustrate the abstract ideas which constantly arise . . .*

The difficulty both of us experienced in forming representations for SLA content seemed related to our comprehension of the metalanguage of linguistic description and SLA, and the extent to which specific SLA theories were applicable to classroom learning. Greta found that thinking of linguistic examples was difficult. However, she found that research reports were more helpful than textbooks in that the reports often provided specific linguistic examples (e.g., Doughty (1991) on relativization and the Accessibility Hierarchy), while the textbook sometimes lacked such examples. She also found that it was easier to find or think of examples for syntax and morphology (e.g., development of negation) than it was for discourse (e.g., the role of interaction in acquisition). Both of us found that our comprehension of the different areas of SLA influenced our ability to create representations. David found that his lack of "deep, well-integrated knowledge" of the social aspects of SLA created trouble for him "being able to explain concepts and theories in more detail" and for him to "provide additional examples if necessary." This was troubling for him, as he believed that good teaching involved going beyond the required texts and giving "greater elaboration of an idea or newer information on the topic." Finally, both of us found that the more clearly an SLA theory could be related to the classroom, the easier it was for us to create compelling representations. For Greta, explaining the Input Hypothesis

and the Affective Filter Hypothesis was relatively easy. Both of these hypotheses appear to have immediate classroom applications, and they invite teacher action and creativity. Explaining continuous and categorical perception, and mental representations (necessary to understanding speech processing theory) was difficult, because these terms do not seem applicable to classroom practice, even though they go far in explaining why adult second language learners have accents. [-8-]

The data suggest that while both of us struggled with SLA representations, we had more facility with planning and carrying out instruction. Our descriptions of instruction are straightforward and detailed, and reveal a clear sense of purpose. David centered his class around interactive lectures. To make the classes interactive, he asked students specific questions, asked them to summarize his comments periodically, and used their questions to generate discussion. David also moved the chairs and tables in his classrooms so that students would face each other, explaining: "The purpose was to make it psychologically easier for students to join in what I hoped would be a considerable amount of interaction rather than a straight lecture."

While David had learned SLA formally through lecture, he consciously created a "graduate seminar atmosphere." He believed that if students could articulate what they understood and take a position on it, they would be more likely to learn and value knowledge of SLA:

> *I decided to be fairly opinionated about the topics we covered because I did not want the course to be a dispassionate transmission of information from teacher to students. I wanted to evoke some emotion on the issues and encourage the students to find something they could believe in and to gain the ability to explain precisely why it made sense to them . . . I hoped they would develop their "voice" in the field.*

David used students' questions to create additional reading assignments and interactive discussions. On several occasions, he assigned two readings that covered the same topic but from two different points of view: "I have often found that reading about the same topic expressed by different writers is helpful." David also believed that successful learning of SLA content involved students relating the content to their experiences as second language teachers and learners. Since many students were either learners or teachers of English or Japanese, he designed a lesson on prototypicality (e.g., Kellerman, 1977), "in which . . . we discussed what meanings of 'break' could be translated from one language to the other." Finally, David chose to have students do a literature review. This was partly because he had done one as a master's degree student and partly because he believed it had been an intense learning experience with real life applicability: "I became a "mini-expert" in that area [maturational constraints] . . . and . . . I did encounter several situations in which I needed to undertake literature reviews, e.g., I wrote proposals for a self access center, the implementation of an extensive reading program . . . ".

Greta had originally planned to lecture extensively. She states: "I had this very foolish notion that I would stand up at the front of the room and spout out wonderful and confident things about SLA, like a previous teacher had done." Uncomfortable with this idea, Greta undertook activities which removed the focus from her and placed it on the students: She says: "I began doing other activities such as pair and group work where students looked at linguistic data and tried to make sense of it." Greta thought that if students could articulate what they thought or knew about SLA content they would be more likely to learn it. Therefore, she designed activities that would allow students opportunities to say and write their beliefs in accordance to specific questions she would pose:

> *I started something called a "chain discussion" where each student would say something about the reading assignment, whatever their level of understanding . . . I assigned questions from the textbook for students to find answers and then post the answers on the discussion forum on the course web page.*

As the course progressed, Greta began to give shorter lectures interspersed with breaks, interactive discussions, question and answer sessions, and pair and group activities. She believed that inductive, discovery type learning activities would motivate students to learn content, and at the same time, develop students' confidence in interpreting linguistic data. A few topics resisted interactive discussion and discovery activities, including Universal Grammar and strong and weak interface positions. Other topics seemed to lend themselves to discovery learning. Greta says:

> *On saliency of vocabulary I would ask students to rank a series of definitions for a word and have them compare their own mental lexicon with other students' . . . In talking about foreigner talk, I asked students to talk about experiences where they*

used foreigner talk, or someone had used it with them. I then asked them to characterize the talk and then compare it post hoc to the list of foreigner talk characteristics described in the textbook. [-9-]

Topics that were difficult to adapt to independent learning activities were abstract, while topics more easy to adapt could be demonstrated in more observable linguistic and learning phenomena. Greta wanted SLA to seem real to students as language teachers and so she assigned students to read language textbooks and "to identify the theories and assumptions of the authors they found in the textbooks." Greta also wanted students to develop individual interests, so she assigned students to choose a data-driven article and present it to the class. Greta intended for the analyses and presentations of SLA articles to serve as the basis for literature reviews students were to write. She thought that writing a literature review would expose students to studies according to their own interests, and would give them the opportunity to synthesize information. Greta also assigned the literature review because this is what she herself had done as a graduate student. To reiterate, we both designed a variety of activities and assignments with some facility, with sensitivity to the content being presented, and for reasons that were clear to us.

RQ #3: Adaptation to students. Both of us adapted to student abilities, interests, and previous knowledge as the course progressed, and our facility with adaptation was related to the role of the course in our respective programs, and to our comprehension of SLA texts. We both responded to student non-comprehension, even if we could not do so immediately. David states:

> *[W]hen I received a difficult question . . . [I] . . . acknowledged that it was a good question, answered it to the best of my ability at that moment and promised to bring more information to the next class. Sometimes I simply elaborated on my initial answer in the next class and at other times I would copy an entire article which answered the question in detail, pass out the article, and summarize the writer's answer to the questions.*

From Greta:

> *I had frequent Q and A sessions in class, and allowed students many opportunities to say what they wanted. I would try to deal with student non-comprehension of ideas in the next class after I'd had time to think about it and formulate some provisional answers . . . After each class and while preparing for the next class, I would reflect on what the previous class had been like and how the students had responded.*

David understood his students' level of knowledge at the outset of the SLA course because he had taught all of them previously and he knew that most of them were nearing the end of the program: "When I handed out the syllabus on the first day of class, I believe they had requisite schema to have some idea of what most of the topics would be about." He therefore felt that the students could handle reading the two required textbooks and research articles. He also knew that his students. were facing a comprehensive examination, stating: "Although I did not consciously teach to the test when choosing readings and writing lectures, I did occasionally point out information and articles which would be particularly useful when preparing for the exam." Finally, David responded to the constraints of his students' schedules and the circumstances of his program by creating an extensive, course-specific reserve library:

> *Providing articles was designed to overcome some potential problems which were specific to my teaching context. First, nearly all of my students have full time jobs and many have spouses and young children. Spending hours looking for articles in the library is not their idea of a good use of time. Second, the library in Osaka is quite limited. Although we have access to a large number of journals and books from other branches of the university, ordering them takes both time and money.*

David's decision to develop a reserve library was also based as an adaptation to earlier experiences with the students in other courses he had taught:

In the past, I have not always been pleased with students' choices of articles, so I decided to try to guard against this problem by providing the articles on reserve. Having been chosen by me, they represented a wide range of views on the topic, they were recent, and they had been written by acknowledged leaders in their respective areas.

Greta was new to her program, and had taught half the students in the course previously. The course had no defined programmatic purpose (e.g., preparing students to take a comprehensive exam), and as
mentioned above, some of the students were taking the course in their first semester of graduate study. After several class meetings Greta was challenged by students' lack of exposure to topics that were likely essential to comprehending much SLA content, such as communicative competence, discourse, and the role of interaction in acquisition, she says: "Students had never studied discourse analysis, and had only a weak understanding of how communication is constructed between users. They didn't know anything about genre, or sociolinguistics." [-10-]

Greta spent a lot of energy adapting to students in these areas by locating or creating linguistic examples and explanations for the phenomena being used to illustrate the theories. She also felt that the students lacked experience with theory: "Students had no background in theory. They felt intimidated by theory, I think, and didn't see it [theorizing] as something they did in every day life. She tried to familiarize students with theory in a language teaching context by using language textbooks and asking students to figure out what theories the authors were basing their writing on. Unfortunately, students tended to simply describe the obvious features of the textbooks and not state any opinions about the authors' theories. The students in general did not state their opinions on any of the SLA content. As one student said, "I'm in my silent period." She found she was unable to effectively adapt to this feature of the students during the course.

Greta adapted to students' lack of familiarity with literature reviews. She explains:

From their comments and questions in class I could see that they were constructing two seemingly mutually exclusive images of the literature review: Either the review was simply their opinions, or the review was simply a reporting of previous research.

Greta created lessons in which she tried to demonstrate that "the writer's opinions very much come into play in terms of the research questions that form the review, the coverage or lack of coverage the writer may give a particular aspect of previous research, or in the way previous research is presented in terms of the writer's assumptions." She continues:

I showed students an article by a colleague on code switching, describing within the text how her opinions were expressed in terms of her omissions and shaping of the previous research. I tried to show how the author's agenda was expressed through her subheadings.

RQ #4: Areas of growth and change. We identified several areas of growth and change. First, both of us also commented on how, as our courses progressed, we took the role of language teachers in explaining content to our students. We think that our shifts in self-image constitute efforts on our part to adapt to students' interests and previous knowledge. For us, knowledge of one area of teaching (language teaching) was a rich source of representations that we would use when teaching in a different area (a finding that has been noted in other educational contexts (Shulman, 1987, p. 15). Given our long experience as language teachers, it is not surprising that we would relate to our students as language teachers as a means of teaching content. From David:

I adopted a language teacher's view of the SLA literature far more than I had imagined I would, because this seemed to be the most effective way to clarify concepts and engage the students' interest. As a result, I talked about models in terms of how I saw them relating or not relating to the classroom, and this was one way in which I critiqued models.

David noted that presenting the content this way seemed to help the non-native English speakers in his class "to make more sense of what the original writers were saying." From Greta:

> *I felt vulnerable. I decided to reveal that vulnerability, because it was easier to reveal it than hide it. I talked to students about my own concerns and confusion in the reading and in my own research. I also talked about my struggles to understand SLA theories and my past and current attempts to apply them to my own teaching. I wanted to be open about my problems and doubts, and how I dealt with my doubts, as a way of showing students that they, too, could go though the process. I suppose I presented myself as a bumbling older sister language teacher who really wanted her younger siblings to understand the concepts and stand up on their own two feet.*

Second, we grew in our understanding of how we could broaden and deepen our comprehension and thus improve our facility for preparing texts for future classes. David felt that the lectures he had prepared most thoroughly had resulted in the best student outcomes: "The early lectures were clear and well organized and as shown by the students' mid-term results, they had grasped the information well and in sufficient detail." David felt continuing frustration with areas of the field he felt he did not deeply comprehend, despite his attempts to prepare for his lectures by reading literature reviews on the topics. The key, for him, was whether or not he knew what the "key issues" were in a given topic. When he did not have a sense of the key issues, he could not transform and teach the topic in a way that satisfied him. Armed with this knowledge, he committed himself to a self-imposed course of intensive reading on sociolinguistic aspects of SLA. He also sought out a specialist in the field for extensive conversations. Greta reflected on the issue of her comprehension as it related to syllabus creation. She concluded that an overall topical syllabus was needed for her to enhance her comprehension of the course content in the long term (by helping her set parameters on what to read) and think of effective representations in the short term. [-11-]

> *I realize now that I have two conceptions for "syllabus." One is the information sheet I give to students about the textbook, office hours, and the requirements for the course. I will call this a Class Information Sheet (CIS). The other conception I have for syllabus is the more classical definition which is a document that defines the content of the course and the ordering of the content in some detail . . . The CIS . . . was not up to guiding my long term teaching or content development of the course. In giving head to the implicit syllabus of the textbook, I could not effectively plan ahead. I was caught flat footed in class many times without truly compelling examples and stories I could use to make the concepts more real. I also gave up decision making power over what I actually wanted students to read and what I wanted to discuss in class.*

Third, we developed a better understanding of the challenges facing students as they attempted to write literature reviews. We affirmed our beliefs that retaining the literature review as an assessment of student learning was important. At the same time, we developed specific ideas on helping students write them. In other words, we adapted to the students we had taught during our first course. In general, we wanted to break down the assignment into smaller, more manageable portions. This would be more suited to students' abilities in light of their lack of experience writing literature reviews. Further we would know much earlier in the course how well students were doing with the assignment, thus giving us more opportunities for evaluation of students' learning. Greta states:

> *I should have controlled their development of the literature review more closely and consistently with many small intermediate steps, such as requiring students to find 15 sources by a certain date, and then evaluating the sources, then having them locate one generalization common to two or more sources and writing up the generalization along with the correct citation for the supporting references. Then having them write the introduction, and getting more feedback.*

David further states, "I need to provide even more explicit information about writing literature reviews . . . . I will add more options in terms of course papers. . . . I would especially welcome data-driven research projects."

We identified several trigger points for growth and change in our teaching. In the interests of space, only two are reported here. One trigger point was our extreme discomfort at not being able to use SLA content representations with the degree of facility we aspired to. As we completed our interviews, it became clear that our discomfort with representations was linked to our level of comprehension and modes of preparation of content. Our discomfort, and the associations we made between the different aspects of pedagogical reasoning created a focus through which we could newly comprehend what our weaknesses were, why we had them, and what we could do about them.

We also gained new comprehension of the texts themselves, realizing that some topics, particularly abstract ones, were simply difficult to

create representations for, and that special effort would be needed. A second trigger point was our effort to adapt to the students. We were frustrated at our inability in the short term to effectively deal with certain student attributes such as their unwillingness to interact or talk in class, their difficulty in synthesizing information and writing it up as a literature review, and their lack of background in linguistics. In terms of increasing student engagement with the content in the classroom, we created many classroom activity plans for the next time we teach SLA. David states:

I will add a variety of small tasks . . . that I hope will serve as the basis for in-class discussions. I will probably have students work on discussion questions or reactions to quote from readings . . . sometimes the entire class will have the same questions and other times I will probably do a jigsaw type activity . . . . Another idea is that I might set up groups who take different sides of an issue. For instance, one group's task might be to summarize reasons why input in important and what might be gained from input. Another group might summarize why input alone is insufficient. [-12-]

Greta states:

> *I will use lots of group and pair activities in class, working with actual data. But I will not avoid doing guided discussion or lectures when I think it is necessary to make concepts clear or to clear up confusion. I will ask guest speakers to come in. After working with the chapters on cognitive processing (which I could not get to this time!), I will also ask students to plan language lessons in class which take automaticity and reformulation into account.*

Discussion

Many observers in general education comment that teacher self-reflection is an effective means of enhancing teacher development and arriving at new comprehensions (Antonek, McCormick, & Donato, 1997; Shulman, 1987; Zeichner, 1999). This study represents an account of reciprocal interviews as a means to self reflection, and as such, is an embodiment of a view of research in which "the beliefs, cognitions, attitudes, and decision making processes of the teachers' themselves" are of primary importance (Widdowson, 1997, p. 125; see also Richards & Nunan, 1987; Woods, 1996). Conducting our mutual interviews and viewing them through the lens of pedagogical reasoning provided us with a number of salient insights relevant to ourselves, TESOL and applied linguistics faculty development, teacher development, and SLA. For example, we discovered that our variable comprehension of SLA texts and theories had profound effects on our course planning, the way we taught, and our level of comfort. Through reflection, we developed well defined strategies for self-directed study and course-design-specific thinking to increase our comprehension of content specifically for the purpose of teaching it. In sum, the interviews, analyses, and reflection were highly worthwhile, both personally and professionally.

The need for field-specific discussion of faculty development. We believe that self and peer reflection are cornerstones of effective faculty development in TESOL and applied linguistics teacher education programs. At the same time, there needs to be more discussion of the issues of faculty preparation and development in these fields. We have been encouraged by recent publications and presentations on topics such as defining content that should be included in TESOL and applied linguistics graduate and certificate programs (e.g., Lin, Brown, Brown, Johnson, Kress, & Diaz-Rico, 2000; Richards, 1998; Wang, in press), discussing teaching methods that can be used (Brown, 2002; Ruby & Verplaetse, 2000), and setting relevant course goals as mediated by programmatic purposes and graduate student needs (Egbert, Paulus, & Nakamichi, 2002). However, discussion is needed on a number of additional issues, such as identifying topics that tend to be conceptually difficult for students, discovering why these are difficult, and suggesting effective means of teaching them. Answers to these questions may lay in sharing compelling metaphors and examples (i.e., representations), suggesting course sequencing or topic inclusion rationales, investigating reasons for student non-comprehension, or discussing techniques for increasing student motivation through demonstrating the relevance of difficult theoretical concepts to future personal and professional satisfaction. Other academic disciplines have regular publication venues in which the teaching of discipline-specific content is discussed (e.g., Burke & Walton, 2002; *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*).

The role of doctoral level educators. Another significant issue requiring further consideration is the role of doctoral programs and doctoral level educators in preparing future faculty. This topic is receiving attention in the fields of mathematics and physics (e.g., Etkina, 2000; McGivney-Burelle, DeFranco, Vinsonhaler, & Santucci, 2001). Surely TESOL and applied linguistics can benefit by acting out of a sensibility of themselves as developed, stand-alone disciplines with a vested interest in inculcating key values and accepted bodies of knowledge in those who will carry the disciplines forward into future generations. As a result of our investigation, we believe that the development of pedagogical content knowledge is key to ensuring that new faculty can provide engaging, comprehensible, and

educationally valuable courses even in their first semester of teaching a course that is new to them. Whatever teachers of doctoral students can do to develop doctoral students' ability to explain difficult, abstract content should be useful in preparing students for their future roles as instructors; this might include asking doctoral students to present a substantial topic to their classmates, or holding elective seminars on teaching TESOL or applied linguistics content which make use of videotaped teaching presentations and discussion. Doctoral faculty can tell their doctoral students their rationale for selecting particular content and then teaching it a particular way, and can remind their students that some of them will become graduate level teachers. Finally, doctoral faculty can invite student commentary on course assignments they are asked to do. This may enable students to consider what types of assignments, and what specific features of those assignments, seem to effectively allow and encourage demonstration of student learning. [-13-]

Teachers and their students as stakeholders in SLA. Our experiences teaching SLA courses for the first time were highlighted in this article because the subject matter presented singular teaching challenges. Interviews with experienced applied linguistics faculty reveal two reasons for this: First, the field has grown exponentially in recent years, becoming difficult for faculty to truly comprehend it all. Second, growth has also meant diversification of the field, making it problematic in deciding what topics to include in a course.

We would like to suggest a third reason: SLA, despite being a subject offered in 75% of U.S. TESOL/Applied Linguistics M.A. and doctoral programs listed in the American Association of Applied Linguistics directory (2000), does not readily welcome newcomers. Students in one of David's classes commented on the visual "dreariness" of their textbooks, a factor they claimed dampened their interest in the field. Further, students in both of our classes found the academic prose of SLA research conceptually opaque, overly detailed, and couched in "technical jargon." Comments on intersections of language pedagogy and SLA made by Ellis (1997) may account for the tone of the literature: Second language acquisition as a discipline is the "preserve of university-based researchers" and practitioners within the field largely aim to contribute to the body of "technical knowledge" of the field through rigorous research and discipline-specific discussion (p. 7). As a result, it was necessary for us to construct and articulate frequent, impromptu, student-attuned interpretations of the texts in our courses, making stringent demands on our limited pedagogical content knowledge. These features of the literature also frustrated our attempts to guide the students towards independent interests within the field. We argue that teachers and their students should be considered as stakeholders in SLA. It is true that interest in intersections between SLA and classroom teachers has increased (e.g., Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Cohen, 1995; Ellis, 1997; Haley & Rentz, 2002). However, we would like to see a refinement of the global terms of "classroom teachers" and "SLA researchers" into "teachers, students, language classroom teachers, and researchers," and see this reflected in ongoing discussion in journals, websites, and conferences; course packages (including reading lists); and in course textbooks (e.g., Gass, Sorace, & Selinker, 1999).

Conclusion

This report characterized our reciprocal-reflection on our initial experiences teaching a specific course. We found that pedagogical reasoning was a compelling model for analyzing our interview data, providing highly relevant information on our strengths, shortcomings, and development as teachers. Through the interviews we arrived at a number of new comprehensions. Teachers have a responsibility for their own future teaching. They should strive to identify one or two content areas they might conceivably teach in future, and use whatever learning opportunities they have for gaining experience, and seeking expertise and advice in teaching that content. Finally, we strongly recommend that new and experienced teachers forge partnerships and openly discuss their teaching.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

1. What were the teaching challenges which presented themselves in our first months/years as graduate faculty?

   1. What content background did you have SLA? (How were you taught?)
   2. What challenges did you face in initially planning the course?
   3. What challenges confronted you in teaching the course?
   4. During the first few class meetings, what feelings did you have? What situations arose?
   5. What situations arose later in the course? Were they different than in the beginning of the course?
   6. What was the mode of your first several class meetings?
   7. As the course went on, did the mode of your class meetings change?
   8. Did you have any sort of image of your teaching before you actually started teaching the course?
   9. Did they change over time?

10. To what do you attribute the changes?
11. Were you satisfied with your teaching at first?
12. What special features of your students do you feel challenged you?
13. How did these challenges make themselves apparent?
14. What preconceptions do you feel students had when they came to class about SLA?
15. About writing literature reviews?
16. About how a class should be conducted?

2. How did we meet these challenges?

1. When you first learned you were going to teach the course, what did you do?
2. Did you look at old course notes, syllabuses, etc.? Was it helpful?
3. What other preparations did you make?
4. What steps did you take to write the syllabus?
5. Were you satisfied with your syllabus? Before the course? During the course? After the course?
6. What was included in the syllabus?
7. Can you articulate now what your general goals and objectives were?
8. What guided you in selecting the textbook and other materials, and the course requirements?
9. Did you have access to anyone who could advise you on the course?
10. During the first few class meetings, how did you deal with any feelings you had?
11. How did you deal with any situations that arose?
12. Before each class meeting, how did you plan your class? What did the planning consist of? How long did it take?
13. Did the preparation/planning change over time?
14. Did it change according to the material being taught?
15. How did you deal with special features of your students? On what basis did you make your decisions?
16. How did you deal with students' preconceptions of the content of your course?
17. How did you deal with students' preconceptions of writing literature reviews?