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Reconstructing the Theory-to-Practice Narrative

Many teacher-development models posit teacher learning as a linear process in which teachers build skills and knowledge while progressing through different stages of expertise. Although this model is attractive for many reasons and often does seem to shed light on some of the aspects of teacher development, this author's own experience largely does not conform to this linear trajectory. In this article, the author describes changes in several aspects of her practice during the course of her 1st year as an ESL teacher at an Intensive English Program (IEP). She situates developments of specific skills, attitudes, and beliefs about teaching within her continually shifting understanding of the interplay between theory and practice.

Introduction

The theme of this section, "theory to practice," implies that novice teachers move from theory, which they learn about in their teacher-training programs, to practice, which takes place in their classrooms once they have "completed" their training. This notion oversimplifies the complexities and variation of the development that actually occurs in the 1st year of teaching. Although many new teachers do move from the sphere of theory to the field of practice in a chronological sense, the interrelationship between these two discourses is more complex. It is only through practice that theory can be contextualized, truly understood, and made use of. Experience helps teachers identify which theories apply to their context, and these theories help teachers shape their practice.

Despite the evidence of many teachers' experiences struggling to reconcile theory and practice, teacher development is often conceptualized as a linear process, a view encouraged by many theoretical models of teacher development. The Dreyfus Model (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986) divides teacher development into separate stages, where the "novice" accumulates skills while moving through progressively more complex stages until she or he attains "expert" status. Feiman-Nemser and Remillard (as cited in Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 2006) note that many stage models segment teacher development into "an initial stage of survival and discovery, a second stage of experimentation and consolidation, and a third stage of mastery and stabilization" (p. 385). This is an attractive

paradigm for several reasons. For teachers, especially new teachers, stage models are a comforting way to think about their own development because they give the impression of constant progress toward the ideal status of expert. They segment teacher development into steps that can be predicted and mastered. It is comforting to have a standardized narrative that applies to all teachers because it means that no one is alone in his or her struggles and that everyone can potentially reach the highest level of proficiency.

It is true that in some general ways, my own development as a teacher can be thought of as continuous and progressive. In graduate school and in my 1st year of teaching I accumulated a body of knowledge and skills that became progressively more refined. I also have a more nuanced understanding of when and how to use a specific method to best effect. Some of my experiences seem to mirror the stages of certain development models. The first time I encountered Maynard and Furlong's (1995) five stages of novice teacher learning, I immediately identified with their categories of Early Idealism, Personal Survival, Dealing With Difficulties, Hitting a Plateau, and Moving On.

On closer examination, I now think that although the names of the stages still strike a chord, I would not say that I moved through the stages sequentially or that I even moved through all of them. None of the stage models of teacher development I have studied seem to adequately represent my experience, mainly because my development cannot be described as a one-way movement from "novice" to "advanced beginner." It is this nonlinear and recursive development I experienced in my 1st year of teaching that I reflect on this article. I describe changes in several aspects of my teaching practice during the course of my 1st year as an ESL teacher, including specific skills, attitudes, and beliefs, and I will situate these developments within my continually shifting understanding of the interplay between theory and practice. It is not my intent to portray all of the changes I describe as improvements; my understanding of teaching and learning continues to be in flux.

Complicating Theory to Practice

> *Knowledge begins with practice, and theoretical knowledge which is acquired through practice must then return to practice.* (Mao Tse Tung, "On Practice")

I entered my MA TESOL program without any prior teaching experience. I had been a tutor, and I had even completed a TESOL certificate program, but I had never been solely responsible for teaching an entire room full of students. For the 1st few semesters, I eagerly soaked up all of the theoretical linguistics, second language acquisition theory, and pedagogical theory my professors offered. Like in many graduate programs in TESOL, there was only a minimal practice component built into the very end of the course sequence. When I wrote lesson plans, it was always for a hypothetical context. When I conducted a lesson, it was always with my classmates and professors as "students." Even my teaching philosophy statement was an exercise in hypothetical thinking: What

kind of teacher did I imagine myself to be? Reading and writing about theory eventually lost its charm, and I started to look for ways to spend more time in a classroom as a teacher, not as a student.

My first teaching job was at a preacademic Intensive English Program (IEP) on my university's campus. The IEP exclusively hires current MA TESOL students with little to no prior classroom experience and offers a rigorous teacher-training program. Although I was not sure at the time whether academic English was an area I wanted to pursue, I realized that this was an opportunity to round out my theoretical training with practical experience in a supportive environment. I prepared my sample lesson plan, reviewed much of the pedagogical theory I had learned thus far, and sweated through my first successful interview for an English teaching job.

When I started working at the IEP, I was about halfway through my MA TESOL course sequence. I had been exposed to a variety of teaching methodologies and pedagogical grammar. I was enrolled in a methodologies class for teaching reading and writing, which was fortuitous because I was assigned to intern in an advanced academic reading, writing, and research class. I was excited because I thought that I would not only see some of the theories I was studying in action but also would be able to try them out for myself. In my MA TESOL program we often talked of theory as something to be applied in the classroom. I expected this to be focus of my first experiences as a teacher; I would plan lessons based on Crookes and Chaudron's (2001) Guidelines for Classroom Instruction, I would use a range of error-correction techniques to help my students notice their mistakes, and I would be sure to use visual, verbal, and physical modalities in the classroom to support students with various learning styles (Gardner, 1983). Little did I know that it would take me more than a year to be able to productively link theories such as these with my practice, and that it would not be by way of directly and consciously applying theoretical knowledge in my classroom.

In fact, rather than streamlining my initial lesson planning and teaching processes, trying to apply theory to practice actually led to a fair amount of difficulty and frustration. I had little context for the theories I had studied, which made it difficult to decide which ones to apply in the planning process and in the classroom. As an intern at the IEP, I apprenticed with a more experienced mentor teacher who acted as a model for inductive teaching practice, a sounding board for my ideas for lessons and activities, and a catalyst for reflection. These constant interactions with my mentor teacher, as well as those with other key support figures, helped me shift my focus from abstract frameworks to concrete events in the classroom. With my attention redirected to specific instances of teacher or student behavior, I slowly began to map the relationships between my actions and my students' reactions.

In subsequent semesters, I rarely consulted theory to plan a specific lesson. I continued to study and reflect on specific instances and types of interactions in my classroom and then to generalize these incidents into patterns. As I gained experience, I relied more on my own judgment and instinct to make decisions. I refined lessons and activities that were successful in the past and re-

placed others that did not work. In the process of experimenting with different ways to deliver the same material and using the same activity in different contexts, I acquired skills and strategies that suited me and the classroom I wanted to build. At the time it seemed as though I was abandoning theory while delving deeper into practice, but now I understand that I was in fact assembling my own versions of pedagogical theories.

The single most important factor that led to my "rediscovery" of theory was the need to rationalize my practice to my own intern. To answer questions about why something did or did not work in a particular lesson, I needed both my experiential knowledge and my understanding of pedagogical theories. It was often the case that the first time I ever articulated (or noticed!) the connection between practice and theory in a specific aspect of my own teaching was when I was attempting to explain my choices to my intern. This metateaching experience of mentoring someone else did much to consolidate my own understanding of theory in practice. Once I had made one connection, others quickly became obvious. I simply had not looked at my practice from a theoretical viewpoint, possibly because the same perspective had not seemed to help me much when I first began as an intern. Now I find myself looking for articles and books I read at the beginning of my MA TESOL program in an effort to understand a student, a classroom event, or a lesson better. With a more solid schema in place, most theory does not seem so abstract anymore.

My development as a teacher in my 1st year of teaching is not easily categorizable. Even with the support and guidance offered by the support structure at the IEP, which helped me think about and develop my practice in ways that would have taken me much longer by myself, my ability to connect the theory I was studying in my graduate courses with my practice in the classroom developed in a circuitous and recursive way. I see it as a sort of circle: I started with almost pure theory, then shifted my focus to practical experience, and finally began to integrate the two. This large cycle consists of many smaller loops that trace my shifting understanding, internalization, and integration of specific teaching skills, attitudes toward teaching, and beliefs about being a teacher. These smaller strands are interwoven but have not developed at the same rate; some aspects of my teaching practice may remain relatively stable while others change in subtle or even drastic ways. It is this complex interplay that makes my growth as a new teacher difficult to sort into discrete stages of development.

Building Skill

Stage models of teacher development posit that teachers move toward expert status by acquiring and mastering an array of distinct teaching skills, possibly in an ideal sequence (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2006). Looking back at my intern semester at the IEP, I can indeed single out specific skills I consciously worked to improve, but I cannot isolate the development of these skills from that of others. One skill I lacked when I first started teaching, for example, was being able to write an effective lesson plan. It was only when I focused on the seemingly separate issue of student engagement that I noticed crucial flaws and omissions in my plans.

My intern experience was characterized by long hours spent planning for short lessons. I was eager to try out all of the pedagogical theories and methods from my graduate courses, but I was unsure which ones to apply to a specific task, activity sequence, or curricular unit. Since I had no teaching experience, I had no way of predicting how any particular lesson would go or where to focus my attention during the planning process. The lesson plans I had written for my MA TESOL classes were scripted completely, including possible student answers to my questions, which, I discovered, was not a practical or sustainable approach during my internship. At the beginning my lesson plans were usually much too long and detailed, which made them unwieldy in the classroom. They were also difficult to read in the moment because I wrote in full paragraphs.

I soon began to create a more practical template to fit my immediate needs. While the amount of detail decreased in some parts of the plan, aspects I had previously ignored or glossed over became more prominent. Some issues, such as finding a way to organize my plan on the page, I worked on independently, but most were directly or indirectly brought to my attention by my mentor teacher. For example, during my observations I noticed that my mentor teacher always gave students a rationale for each activity, and that the students seemed to like this. Of course I had read about theories of motivation, but for these ideas to truly sink in, I had to see actual students nod their heads in understanding at the rationale presented by the teacher and then respond with more engagement in a real classroom.

Including rationale was one of the first teaching points I worked on consciously, and it was one of the first changes visible in my lesson plans. My first attempts were vague because I did not know the curriculum or my students well enough to know how a particular task would be beneficial in the long run. My mentor teacher offered explanations of her own rationale for a few specific activities, but she encouraged me to extrapolate patterns from moments in my own lessons. What was the difference between the times students "bought in" to the activity and the times they resisted? Could I connect their reactions to the way I presented rationale in each case? At first it was difficult to think in this way because to me, these incidents were unrelated. The discussions with my mentor teacher and coordinator often opened my eyes to previously hidden connections between lessons and activities and helped me notice larger themes in my practice.

Another quick addition to my planning routine was explicit transitions. Since I often taught for short bursts of time in the middle of my mentor teacher's lesson, I was used to including some sort of transition at the beginning and at the end of my part to link to her part. It was only after I noticed that students did not always follow my own train of thought that I realized I needed to make more clear connections. It was not enough to say that we were starting a new activity; I had to let the students know how this activity was connected to the last one and how it would connect to the next one. Since this can be difficult to remember in the middle of leading a class, I started scripting transitions at the beginning and end of each activity. When I recognized that what had seemed to me to be a single activity actually comprised different steps, my lesson plans

began to really transform. Breaking up an activity into pieces allowed me to insert transitions to hold it all together and to help students follow along. It did not take long for me to combine transitions and rationales into a single building block to help me organize my lessons.

After I had taught the same class a couple of times, my transitions became more complex. I knew the curriculum better and was able to make bigger connections between a single task and the goals of the lesson, the unit, and the course as a whole. With this larger view, I was much more successful at integrating specific lessons with the curriculum, other academic skills, and my students' prior knowledge and experiences.

My lesson plans continue to evolve. I have settled on a visual structure that seems to work for me most of the time. I almost always script transitions and rationale, but depending on the lesson I also include specific wording for key questions, directions, and explanations. Because of my more precise "chunking" of tasks and activities, I am better at predicting the amount of time a particular activity will take even if I have never taught it before.

It is clear that my lesson plans would not have developed in this particular way at this time had I not also been working on including more rationale and transitions to increase student engagement. Teaching skills cannot be separated into the discrete units favored by stage models of teacher development; they must be considered as codependent and interwoven.

Changing Attitude

Traditionally, learning is considered to be the acquisition of skills. However, there are other components to teacher learning that are just as, if not more, crucial. Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) argue that "long-lasting change and development must start with our awareness and our attitudes" (p. 24). I certainly underwent a few attitude adjustments in my 1st year as a teacher that revealed new and more productive ways of thinking, learning, and teaching.

I used to think that a good teacher is a teacher who is constantly engaging with students through discussion, questions, and explanations—in other words, constantly talking. Silence in the classroom was something that made me very uncomfortable as a new teacher. It still does to some extent, and sometimes I struggle with my impulse to talk through pauses. It is strange to be in a situation where no one will interrupt you, even if you are repeating yourself for the third time, and it is exhilarating when it looks as though your listeners are paying close attention and maybe even taking notes! An added bonus for a new teacher is that it seems as though you have more control over the flow, content, and timing of a lesson if you are doing most of the talking yourself. This is an illusion, of course; I soon figured out that time disappeared the fastest while I was delivering a monologue. After 5 semesters at the IEP, I now try to emulate my mentor's attentiveness to what the students are doing at any given moment in a lesson. Shifting my focus from myself to my students has resulted in a shift in my understanding of what it means to be a teacher: My job is not to teach my students, it is to help them learn. I now look for evidence of learning in my classroom, and the only way I can do this is by listening to my students. I had to learn to embrace silence.

The first kind of silence I had to get used to is the silence that appears after a question from the teacher. Even on my 1st day in the classroom I knew that I was supposed to give my students time to think after asking them a question, but 5 seconds seemed like an eternity. Countless monsters reared their heads in my mind: Had I used a vocabulary word they did not know? Did I phrase my question clearly? Did I ask one question or was it actually three? Was the question answerable? Was it even a question? I was ecstatic when someone raised his or her hand right away but after a few lessons it became apparent that the same few students were answering every time. I thought I was waiting long enough, but my mentor teacher encouraged me to wait a little longer. I had to force myself to keep from repeating, rephrasing, or even answering my questions, but soon I noticed the difference this was making. More students raised their hands, and the ones who had participated before produced more complex answers. The realization that my questions were not malformed (at least most of the time) gave me confidence in my abilities, and the answers I was getting increased my trust in my students. I now routinely use wait time after questions to strategically direct the flow of talk in my classroom. Building in thinking time, and sometimes even writing time, before I accept answers allows me to call on students who tend to be quiet while pushing the more talkative ones to elaborate on their first idea. Lately I have been experimenting with ways to use strategic silence to break away from the traditional teacher-talk pattern of immediately evaluating or commenting on a student response. My goal is to step aside at crucial moments so my students have more opportunities to talk to each other without my interference.

It took me quite a while longer to accept and make use of the kind of silence that reigns during in-class reading and writing tasks. I used to shy away from assigning these tasks because it did not match my image of a successful lesson: All of my students working silently on their own did not seem to be consistent with a communicative, dynamic, and engaging classroom. I was also unsure about what I would be doing during this time. Surely I could not just sit at my desk, sternly surveying the rows of diligent students. I felt quite strongly that there were much better ways to spend our limited class time and that my students should do most of their reading and writing at home. Encouraged by my success with extended wait time after questions, I thought I could help students remember their ideas better if they made some notes during this time. Several of my students mentioned that they liked this in their end-of-term evaluations because it gave them time to really think. It was then I remembered that one of the central themes of my pedagogy-of-writing graduate course was that writing is a process of discovery. I had actually said this to my students before, but I had always associated it with different steps of writing an essay. Now it dawned on me that it works the same way in different situations and that it could benefit my students in answering a single difficult question, preparing for a class discussion, or even consolidating information at the end of a lesson. Writing was not just the recording of ideas, but actually the making of ideas.

I still talk a lot in my classes, but at least now I am aware of it. Knowing that I can get carried away, I structure my lessons to include at least a few mo-

ments when my students can reflect, plan, or just think in peace. My changed attitude toward silence has allowed me to use pedagogical methods I would have avoided in the past, and it has prepared me for the possibility that I must examine other aspects of my practice that are based on unfounded or misguided assumptions. Such complexity of development cannot be accounted for by a traditional stage model of teacher development, as such models generally do not address the underlying causes of change.

Shifting Beliefs

Teacher identity is one aspect of teacher development that is never accounted for in stage models of teacher learning and rarely addressed in teacher-training programs. Yet the way we see ourselves as teachers frames all of our choices: what we choose to teach, how we teach it, and why we become teachers in the first place. Even though I had never taught before I began work at the IEP, I had spent about 17 years in various classrooms building an understanding of what teaching is. I had a wealth of schema about language teaching in particular before I ever set foot into a MA TESOL course, which must necessarily be the basis for my further development as a teacher. "Prior images of teachers and assumptions about teaching shape our practice and the way we think about teaching (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001, p. 53). My beliefs about teaching have shifted in various ways since I became a teacher myself, as they must when confronted with contradictory information and novel experiences.

One profound way in which my beliefs have changed is the extent to which I have internalized the identity of "teacher." I used to compare teaching to performing on stage; the teacher is the leading actor who plays the role of guide or lecturer or corrector, students are the audience that must be kept interested, and the lesson plan is the script (but sometimes improvisation is necessary). The analogy seems to hold, and it was common to hear us use this language as interns to describe our own work in the classroom because we had not taken on the identity of teachers yet. How could we, when we were all still attending our own classes in the MA TESOL program? Social identity theory holds that we all have access to a multitude of identities, and that our primary identification can change in different contexts (Johnson, 2001). However, in my experience it was extremely difficult to separate my student and teacher identities.

Of the two, the stronger one was my student identity. I had been a student for most of my life, and a successful one at that. I was comfortable with this part of my persona. When I began my teaching internship, I equated "intern" with "student teacher," which was familiar ground; I still saw myself as primarily a student whose job was to learn something from someone else. This was fine during the observation phase of my internship, but as soon as I stood up in front of the class for the first time, I was in turmoil. I found that I identified much more strongly with the students in my classroom than with my fellow teachers. I wanted to sit back down, take notes, and just ask a question now and then.

My identification with my students led to some interesting challenges. Giving feedback and making corrections was very difficult at first. I often tried

to soften my immediate feedback to spare my students' feelings, but it only sounded tentative and confused my students. I was overly ambitious with my written comments on student work; after all, I had often complained about late or sparse comments on my own papers as a student. This meant I spent whole weekends writing detailed responses to students. I worked hard to invent new and creative activities that I thought my students would enjoy, but now I know that many of them were overly complicated and sometimes obscured the actual teaching point they were meant to convey. My mentors observed me often when I was an intern, and although I knew they would always be supportive, it always made me nervous because I felt I was being "tested."

Throughout my internship I slowly became better at containing my competing identities in their separate contexts. I continued to be a student in my MA TESOL classes, and most often in meetings with my mentor teacher and coordinator as well. At the same time I started to feel like a real teacher while teaching, mostly because my students were treating me like one. The next semester was crucial in the development of my teacher identity. I was in charge of my own class for the first time without the reassuring presence of a mentor, which was a little scary but freeing at the same time. I now had room to really make the class my own, but I also happened to be working with a particularly rowdy group of students. They were young, away from home for the first time, and excited that it was summer. I had not faced classroom-management issues of this magnitude before, so I was a little surprised at myself when I responded to these students with authority. I was not always confident that my methods to control the classroom were the most effective, but I never doubted that I had the right to control. This was a new feeling, and perhaps it was not exactly a step forward in my development of good practice, but it did reinforce at least one aspect of my fragile teacher identity.

When I graduated from my MA TESOL program, I had been teaching at the IEP for 1 year. I was relieved I no longer had to juggle the positions (and workload!) of student and teacher at the same time. My student identity is not gone; it simply has become less relevant to my life. I can sympathize with my students, but I no longer align with them in my behavior and way of thinking. As I gain confidence in my teacher persona, I welcome observations, feedback, and collaboration more. I still feel a twinge of nerves when my supervisor watches me teach, but I look forward to the exchange that takes place afterward. I have also become more interested in observing my colleagues to learn about different ways of being in the classroom.

I am revising my identity as a teacher as I go along. In some respects I feel that I am a "good teacher," but in others I acutely feel my "beginner" status. I still spend too much time writing comments on student work and agonizing over lesson plans. I do not always understand everything that happens in my classroom. Every time I teach a new skill, or a new subject, or a new group of students, I relive a different version of my 1st semester as a teacher and find myself struggling with some familiar issues, as well as a lot of unfamiliar ones. Were I to focus on just my acquisition of teaching skills, I would miss the more fundamental shift in my way of being a teacher. I am not the same teacher that

I was a year ago, or even last semester, and I must continue to be open to "the constant restructuring of our teaching selves that leads to professional development" (Mingucci, as cited in Bailey et al., 2001, p. 152).

Implications

Although stage models of teacher development oversimplify many components of the process and ignore others, I believe they are still a useful starting point for new teachers. For me it was interesting to find out that the experiences of 1st-year teachers had been studied and theorized at all and reassuring to note the immediate relatability of the stages of some of the models. The stages can serve as points of comparison for new teachers' experiences in the classroom, and these models also provide useful language for talking about these experiences. Sometimes they may reinforce a teacher's perception of her or his level of practice, and other times they may cause deeper reflection when her or his experiences seem to deviate from the norm. In an effort to account for this variation, teachers could chart their own pathways of development and posit new models.

My recursive movement from theory to practice and finally to an integration of the two highlights the importance of incorporating practice into teacher-training programs as early as possible. I did not have the schema for many of the theories I read about early in my MA TESOL program, so I was not able to use them in the correct context later on. This is bound to happen no matter how a training program is organized, but I do believe it would have helped me concretize this new knowledge had I been exposed to more practical applications of these theories at the same time. Reading about these theories was not enough; I also needed to see what they look like in action. Guided classroom observations would do much to demystify theory, as would more authentic teacher tasks built into the curriculum, more required teaching assistantships, and earlier contact with possible mentor teachers.

Just as stage models of teacher development do not allow for multidirectional movement through multiple stages at once, they also overlook the foundational question of attitude and identity. The skills and techniques we learn as new teachers are important, but how we feel about them even more so because that will shape our development. We should have conversations about how to integrate multiple identities in the classroom, how to cope with imposed identities that are attached to teachers by others, and how to work toward our ideal imagined teacher identities.

It is crucial that we integrate the teacher identity with others we already own in order to understand and adjust to our role in the classroom, but the matter is too often left to each teacher to grapple with alone. We need more frank discussions about how we view ourselves as ESOL teachers in relation to our other identities as students, parents, native English speakers, multilingual users of English, tutors, women, men, Chinese, Australian, members of the middle class, and so forth. We not only need to integrate our new teacher identity with others, but we also need to be aware of how our various identities shape our teaching selves.

When I tell people that I am an English teacher, it is common for them to make a joke about how bad they are at grammar. Outsiders tend to see us as grammarians, and our students and textbooks often share this view. It is interesting, then, that most of the new teachers I know are most anxious about teaching grammar. We are worried that we will not be able to answer a question, or worse, that we will answer it incorrectly. The night before a lesson, we study the grammar points that are likely to appear so we have an answer ready. To complicate the issue further, we learn in our MA TESOL pedagogy classes that our job is to support students in gaining communicative competence, and to focus on grammar correction only when it interferes with meaning. These competing views of what an English teacher is can be confusing and frustrating to navigate for any teacher, but especially for new teachers who have not had time to solidify their own teacher identity.

It is possible that new teachers have not thought much about what kind of teacher they are or want to be; many of their assumptions about teaching remain tacit and uninterrogated. We all have images of "good teachers," possibly amalgamated from memories of our own teachers from as early as kindergarten, but it is not often we examine those images. Mine tend to focus on affective themes: I liked Mr. Smith because he told jokes, and I liked Ms. Abbott because she shook our hands after we completed a test. Should we strive to be like our favorite teachers from the past? Does a good ESL teacher at an IEP have the same qualities as a good fourth-grade science teacher? These are questions we should ask ourselves and revisit often to discover our values and beliefs about our profession and to help us in becoming the teachers we want to be.

Conclusion

Stage models of teacher development are useful catalysts for reflection, but they can limit us to simply tracking our progress toward "expertise" rather than toward gaining an appreciation of the idiosyncratic, nonlinear, and recursive path we are more likely to follow. Stage models are attractive precisely because they simplify our complex and sometimes confusing experiences—what Hattie (2012) refers to as "the staccato of teaching and learning" (p. 35)—into neat boxes. We tend to categorize student achievement in similar ways (beginner, high-beginner, low-intermediate, etc.), but we also know that things are not quite that simple. We know that there is immense variability within each level, not just between different students but even between different skills of the same student. We know that learning is not always a linear process; sometimes students experience setbacks, sometimes they seem to be stuck at one level for a long time, sometimes their speaking ability far outpaces their writing skills, and sometimes they suddenly just "get" that grammar point. The label of "high-intermediate student" is informative only to a limited extent, just as the label "novice teacher" conceals any number of skills, beliefs, theories, and experiences in flux with one another.

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