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# Constraints on academics' potential for developing as a teacher

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This study undertook a phenomenographic analysis of academics' ways of approaching their growth and development as a university teacher. The focus of the study is on the meanings and intentions underlying different ways of going about developing as a teacher, and how this relates to the ways in which academics understand the nature of teaching development and being a university teacher. Five different approaches to developing as a university teacher emerged, varying from a focus on building up a better knowledge of one's content area, in order to become more familiar with what to teach, to continually increasing one's understanding of what works and does not work for students, in order to become more effective in facilitating student learning. The approaches experienced by academics, and the meanings and intentions associated with them, are seen as constituting constraints on their potential for developing as a teacher. Implications for academic development are discussed.

## Introduction

The study reported in this article builds on a body of research which has been developing since the early 1990s, looking at university teaching from the perspective of teachers themselves. This research has explored the meaning that teaching holds for academics, or adult educators, as teachers (Dall'Alba, 1991; Martin & Balla, 1991; Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001; Martin & Ramsden, 1992; Gow & Kember, 1993; Kember, 1997; Van Driel *et al.*, 1997; Murray & MacDonald, 1997; Pratt *et al.*, 1998; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, chapter 7; Wood, 2000; Åkerlind, 2004), as well as teachers' views of the relationship between teaching and learning (Åkerlind & Jenkins, 1998; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, chapter 7).

### *Different ways of understanding teaching*

Across the range of studies of academics' views of teaching, a consistent variation has been observed. All studies show the following two key aspects of variation in the meaning that teaching holds for academics:

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- a variation in focus from transmission of *information* to students to the development of conceptual *understanding* in students; and
- an associated variation in focus from the *teacher* and their teaching strategies to the *students* and their learning and development.

A combined focus on the teacher, their teaching strategies and transmission of information to students is generally referred to as a ‘teacher-centred’ focus on teaching, while a combined focus on students, their learning, development and conceptual understanding is generally referred to as a ‘student-centred’ focus. A teacher-centered focus is consistently seen across the range of studies as constituting a less sophisticated understanding of teaching than a student-centered focus, and is regarded as less likely to produce high-quality learning outcomes amongst students (Pratt is an exception here, as he deliberately avoids any form of judgement of different understandings of teaching, in terms of implications for teaching effectiveness or quality).

At the same time, an empirical relationship between teachers’ views of teaching and students’ approaches to learning has also been shown (Kember & Gow, 1994; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, chapter 7), with a more sophisticated view of teaching amongst *teachers* being associated with a more sophisticated view of learning amongst *students*. Prosser and Trigwell report that ‘university teachers who focus on their students and their students’ learning tend to have students who focus on meaning and understanding in their studies, while university teachers who focus on themselves and what they are doing tend to have students who focus on reproduction’ (p. 142). More sophisticated approaches to learning are also associated with better learning outcomes amongst students (Biggs, 1999; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Ramsden, 2003), in terms of deeper understanding of the course material. This may or may not include better assessment grades, depending on what type of learning the assessment is designed to test. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for university-level assessment to test memorisation of material rather than more meaningful understanding.

At this point, it is worth noting key ontological differences between the different studies of teachers’ views of teaching, in terms of what different researchers mean by a view, conception or way of understanding teaching. Some of the studies have been conducted from a *phenomenographic* perspective, where different conceptions of teaching are seen as representing different breadths of awareness of the phenomenon of teaching, constituted as an experiential relationship between the teacher and the phenomenon. Other studies have been conducted from a more *cognitivist* perspective, where different conceptions are seen as reflecting different beliefs about teaching associated with different mental representations of the phenomenon, constructed on the basis of individuals’ experience.

The most obvious difference in research outcomes resulting from these different research perspectives is that the studies conducted from a more cognitivist perspective position the different views of teaching that emerge from the studies as *independently* constituted, even if they may be ordered on a continuum of sophistication (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001; Gow & Kember, 1993; Kember, 1997; Murray &

MacDonald, 1997; Pratt, 1998; Van Driel *et al.*, 1997). In contrast, the studies conducted from a phenomenographic perspective position the different views of teaching that emerge as related in a hierarchy of *inclusiveness* (Dall'Alba, 1991; Martin & Balla, 1991; Martin & Ramsden, 1992; Åkerlind & Jenkins, 1998; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, chapter 7; Wood, 2000; Åkerlind, 2003, 2004; McKenzie, 2003). This distinction is significant for the study reported here, which has been conducted from a phenomenographic perspective.

### *Different ways of understanding teaching development and change*

Two recent phenomenographic studies have extended the research into teachers' experiences of teaching by exploring teaching growth, development and change, again from the perspective of university teachers themselves (Åkerlind, 2003; McKenzie, 2003).

In an investigation of academics' ways of understanding their own growth and development as a university teacher, Åkerlind described three qualitatively different views, varying in focus on teaching development experienced as an increase in:

- the teacher's *comfort with teaching*, in terms of feeling more confident as a teacher or teaching becoming less effortful;
- the teacher's *knowledge and skills*, in terms of expanding their content knowledge and teaching materials, and/or expanding their repertoire of teaching strategies; and
- *learning outcomes* for students, in terms of improving their students' learning and development.

In an independent investigation of university teachers' ways of understanding change in their teaching over time, McKenzie (2003) described four primary experiences of change:

- change in the *content* that is taught;
- change in teaching *strategies*;
- relating teaching more closely to student *learning*; and
- coming to experience teaching in a more *student-focused* way.

As with Åkerlind's study, McKenzie's first two ways of understanding change in teaching included a focus on increasing the teacher's comfort, confidence and efficiency in teaching. The underlying intention appears to be improving teaching *for the teacher*. Again, in line with Åkerlind's third and final way of understanding teaching growth and development, McKenzie's last two ways of understanding change in teaching included a focus on improving learning *for the students*.

Given the independent nature of these two studies, the consistency in outcomes is striking and provides strong support for the findings. Furthermore, the key distinction between teacher-focused and student-focused understandings of teaching that emerged in previous research is replicated in these studies. In both studies, a key dimension of variation in the meaning that teaching change and development holds for teachers included a primary focus on:

- the *teacher*, in terms of their teaching comfort, knowledge and skills; or
- the *students*, in terms of their learning and development, and the relationship between teaching and learning.

In line with the phenomenographic approach adopted in the two studies, the different understandings of teaching development and change that emerged are presented as linked in a hierarchy of inclusiveness, with an overall expansion between categories from less to more complex understandings of the phenomena. Thus, as with the research into conceptions of teaching, teacher-focused conceptions of teaching development and change appear to be less sophisticated than student-focused conceptions. That is, they appear to be less complex, less inclusive and, thus, more limited in nature.

In addition, both Åkerlind and McKenzie explored empirically the relationship between university teachers' understandings of teaching and the same teachers' understandings of their own development or change. In both studies, more teacher-focused understandings of teaching were associated with more teacher-focused understandings of teaching development or change. Conversely, more student-focused understandings of teaching were associated with more student-focused understandings of teaching development or change. These associations are in line with the inherent relationships one would expect between an individual's way of understanding teaching and being a teacher, and their way of understanding change and development as a teacher.

### **Aims of this article**

The research reported in this article builds in particular on the Åkerlind (2003) study described above. The aim is to extend that research into academics' ways of understanding their own growth and development as a teacher (conceptions of teaching development) by exploring the ways in which the same set of academics undertake, or go about, their development as a teacher (approaches to teaching development), and relating this back to their understandings of teaching development.

Other phenomenographic research has demonstrated a value in exploring ways of experiencing the same phenomenon from these different perspectives; that is, with a focus on investigating *conceptions* of a phenomenon versus *approaches* to a phenomenon. Prosser and Trigwell (1999, chapter 7) have explored conceptions of teaching, approaches to teaching, and the logical relationships between them. Similarly, Marton has explored both conceptions of learning and approaches to learning (Marton & Booth, 1997) with independent investigations of empirical relations between them (Van Rossum & Schenk, 1984; Marton & Saljo, 1997).

While both conceptions and approaches describe ways of experiencing a phenomenon, reflecting the dialectical relationship between them, they involve somewhat different foci to exploring the nature of the experience. Based on the arguments of Marton and Booth (1997), the experience of any phenomenon may be seen as involving both a 'what' and a 'how' aspect. For example, the experience of learning involves

both *what* people think learning is and *how* they go about learning. An exploration of *approaches* indicates a focus on investigating the 'how' aspect of people's experience of the phenomenon, in terms of how they *handle* the phenomenon. In contrast, an exploration of *conceptions*, whilst incorporating the how aspect, typically indicates a relatively stronger focus on exploring the 'what' aspect of people's experience of the phenomenon, in terms of what the phenomenon itself means to people, i.e. what they think it is.

The 'how' aspect, or approaches, to learning may be further broken down analytically into an *act* of learning, that is, what people do to learn, and an *indirect object* of learning, that is, what the act of learning is aimed at. The indirect object of learning represents the kinds of learning outcomes or capabilities the learner is trying to develop (this may be contrasted with the *direct object* or 'what aspect' of learning, which represents the content being learned). Marton and Booth's (1997) model of key structural aspects of the experience of learning (see Figure 1) illustrates the analytic separation of conceptions of learning into a how and what aspect, and approaches to learning into an act and indirect object of learning. This model is seen as being of direct relevance to an analysis of ways of experiencing teaching development, as described further in the discussion section of this article.

## Methodology

### *Research perspective*

This study was conducted from a phenomenographic research perspective (Marton & Booth, 1997). Empirically, this involves a search for variation in meaning, based on constituting key aspects of variation in human experience of the phenomenon being investigated. Different meanings, or ways of experiencing, may then be categorised in terms of awareness and non-awareness of each of the aspects identified. These categories may then be hierarchically ordered on the basis of increasing breadth of awareness of the different aspects of the phenomenon.

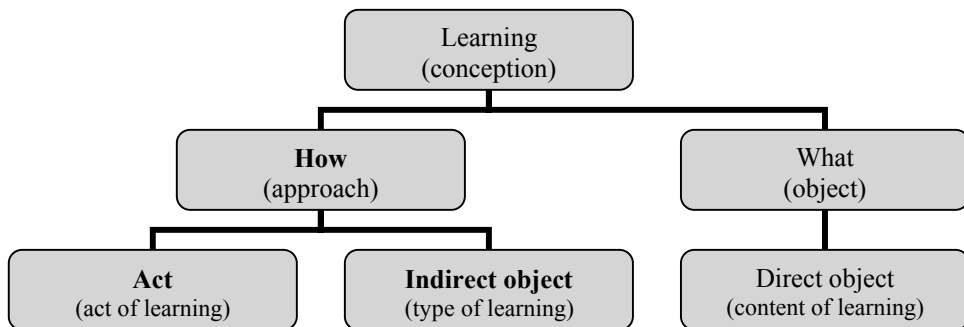


Figure 1. The how aspect of learning can be further analysed into an act and indirect object of learning (derived from Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 85, Fig. 5.2)

It is argued that individuals experience the world differently because experience is always partial. Thus, at any one point in time and context, people manage to discern and experience different aspects of any phenomenon to different degrees. Different ways of experiencing, both in terms of conceptions of and approaches to, a phenomenon may then be understood in terms of which aspects of the phenomenon are discerned and not discerned in people's awareness of the phenomenon. Awareness of an aspect is indicated by the perception of the *potential for variation* in that aspect; lack of awareness is indicated by an implicit, taken-for-granted assumption of uniformity in that aspect of the phenomenon.

It is assumed that different ways of experiencing a phenomenon would typically be logically related through shared discernment of key aspects of the phenomenon. Thus, during the data analysis, the different ways of experiencing that emerge are not constituted independently, but in relation to each other. These different ways of experiencing may commonly be ordered in terms of inclusivity of awareness, where more inclusive ways also represent more complex ways, indicated by an *increasing breadth of awareness* of different aspects of the phenomenon being investigated.

### *Research methods*

For this study, 28 academics were interviewed. All of the interviewees were on teaching and research appointments at a research-intensive university in Australia. Within this institutional context, the academics interviewed were selected to represent as much variation as possible, being from varied disciplines, cultural backgrounds and gender, with varying levels of experience as an academic, and on varying conditions of appointment. The sample included academics appointed from Levels A to C of the Australian Academic Classification range. Levels A and B represent academic career entry-level appointments (though promotion from A to B is also possible) and Level C typically represents a mid to final career appointment.

Interviews were semi-structured, asking academics what growing and developing as a teacher meant to them, how they went about it, what they were trying to achieve, why they did things that way, etc., but working primarily from examples of development activities volunteered by the interviewees during the course of the interview. Unstructured follow-up questions were used to encourage further elaboration of the topic or to check the meaning that interviewees associated with key words that they used. However, the aim at all times was to provide opportunities for the interviewees to reveal their current experience of the phenomenon as fully as possible without the interviewer introducing any new aspects not previously mentioned by the interviewee.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. As the researcher, I then analysed the interviews in an iterative manner, repeatedly reading through transcripts, searching for the underlying foci and intentions expressed in them, comparing and contrasting them for similarities and differences, and looking for key structural relationships which related as well as distinguished them to and from each other. As I started to constitute key meanings, dimensions of variation and relationships within the data, I proceeded to iterate between alternately focusing on the analytic outcomes



and the original transcript data, looking to confirm, contradict and modify my emerging hypotheses about meanings and relationships. This continued until a consistent set of categories of description, representing different ways of approaching teaching growth and development, eventuated (see Åkerlind [2005] for a more detailed description of phenomenographic methodology).

## Outcomes

Five qualitatively different approaches to growing and developing as a university teacher emerged from my analysis of the interview transcripts, varyingly focused on:

- building up a better knowledge of one's content area, in order to become more familiar with *what to teach*;
- building up practical experience as a teacher, in order to become more familiar with *how to teach*;
- building up a repertoire of teaching strategies, in order to become more *skilful as a teacher*;
- finding out which teaching strategies do and don't work for the teacher, in order to become more *effective as a teacher*;
- continually increasing one's understanding of what works and doesn't work for students, in order to become more *effective in facilitating student learning*.

Each category is described in more detail below, with a brief illustration of key aspects of the categories through verbatim quotations from relevant interview transcripts. As will become apparent, these categories represent not just different views of growing and developing as a teacher, but more complex views, with each new category including awareness of the dimensions of growth and development highlighted in the previous categories.

### *1. Teaching development as building up a better knowledge of one's content area, in order to become more familiar with what to teach*

The focus of teaching development in this category is on acquiring further content knowledge, with the underlying intention of becoming more familiar with the subject area one is teaching. With familiarity, the teacher experiences themselves as becoming more confident and teaching is experienced as being easier and more comfortable. Particular strategies used to build up better content knowledge include reading disciplinary literature, collecting relevant materials and examples, and conducting research. For example:

Well, developing the course material. Becoming more familiar with it means that it will be easier to impart to students. When it's easier to impart, that means the teaching is better. So, developing as a teacher of this course would mean being more familiar with the material to do that. (Natural sciences, male, Level A, interview 19)

This developmental focus need not mean that content knowledge is regarded as the only important aspect of teaching. Teacher enthusiasm, approachability and ability



to generate student interest were also mentioned as being important in teaching. However, content knowledge is regarded as the only aspect to focus on for developmental purposes, as other aspects of teaching are seen as occurring *naturally*. For example:

When you are teaching, you are potentially influencing them [students]. I don't have a method of making them more active, that is done naturally when you are teaching. Your personality will have an influence on the students. (Natural sciences, male, Level B, interview 12)

Do these academics envisage a time when no further content development would be necessary and teaching development could focus in another arena? Not necessarily. There may always be more to learn, through ongoing development of new knowledge in the the same or different course areas. For example:

I know I will never get to the end of the backlog of reading and [subject materials]. That is outright exciting! (Cultural studies, male, Level C, interview 22)

I like to change the subjects as well ... If I teach a subject too long, I don't feel I am going to learn more from the subject, and I get tired of it. When that happens, I want to change to a new subject. (Information sciences, male, Level C, interview 25)

## 2. *Teaching development as building up practical experience as a teacher, in order to become more familiar with how to teach*

The focus of this category is on becoming experienced as a teacher. As with the previous category, there is a sense that with familiarity the teacher becomes more confident, and teaching feels easier and more comfortable. However, in this category the focus is on the activity of teaching rather than the content of teaching, i.e. becoming familiar with *how* to teach not just *what* to teach. The basic developmental strategy is one of learning by doing; that is, becoming experienced in teaching simply by engaging in it. This might vary from doing the minimum to actively challenging oneself by regularly seeking out new teaching situations or content areas. For example:

you just do it [learn to teach], you throw yourself in and do it. (Natural sciences, female, Level C, interview 24)

Putting myself in new situations, that's the only way I've improved. If I don't try something new, I don't seem to grow. (Social sciences, male, Level B, interview 15)

I used to find that I would stress a bit to prepare classes, carry them off, because I didn't quite have the experience to do them. Now, I can take control of a class more directly, I have the confidence in terms of material I am presenting ... I think that produces better outcomes. ... I think it is simply experience. (Languages, male, Level C, interview 27)

As in the previous category, teaching skill is seen as occurring 'naturally'. The role of teaching experience appears to be primarily to allow one's natural abilities as a teacher to emerge and develop. For example:

I think it's something that to some extent it cannot be taught. Or you don't really learn. It is either there or it is not there, I think ... There is no way that a bad teacher can be turned

into a good teacher, no matter how many courses they decide to follow. (Natural sciences, female, Level C, interview 24)

*3. Teaching development as building up a repertoire of teaching strategies, in order to become more skilful as a teacher*

As with the previous category, the focus of teaching development in this category is on teaching activities or skill, i.e. how to teach. However, the intention goes beyond simple familiarity with teaching, to acquiring a substantial range of teaching strategies, in order to further develop teaching skills. While this focus on strategies can include those which develop out of one's experience as a teacher (as with the previous category), the strategies acquired appear to be experienced as less 'natural' and spontaneous in nature. They seem to be perceived as requiring more active effort and external input of ideas to develop, and there is explicit awareness that the same individual may teach more or less well, depending on the strategies they employ. Particular activities used to build up additional teaching strategies include reading educational literature, attending educational courses or workshops and observing teaching colleagues in action. For example:

I was talking to a friend ... she was talking about a take-home exam where students are asked to suggest what they would like to add and what they would like to take away. It's fairly obvious, but perhaps I'll do that this time around. So, I'm always listening out and picking up things. (Humanities, female, Level B, interview 18)

Well, every textbook is different. Every textbook does something, something different, and you teach differently in response to that ... I have to do different things with the text to make it workable and usable for students. So, I do think I am kind of constant, but learn things on the way. I'm also afraid of forgetting things that I once knew. You have some really good strategies at your fingertips, and then you don't do that particular class or that particular way of teaching for two years. (Languages, female, Level C, interview 29)

The accumulation of strategies may be experienced as reaching a steady state, in which the repertoire acquired feels adequate. Alternatively, it may be seen as having the potential to expand indefinitely:

I think maintaining creativity is important to growth, creativity in teaching ... I would like to try to do a few different things in assessment ... That sort of stuff, which might be a little different for students in this department ... It would be nice to do some new teaching things ... I'd like to go and do some short courses. (Social sciences, female, Level B, interview 8)

I feel as though I am more in a steady state ... So I think if I was honest with myself, I think that a lot of the hard work is done and for the time being I'm sort of happy to be stuck in the mud and just polish the edges. (Natural sciences, male, Level C, interview 28)

*4. Teaching development as finding out which teaching strategies do and don't work for the teacher, in order to become more effective as a teacher*

While this approach also focuses on developing teaching through accumulating a repertoire of teaching strategies, there is an explicit emphasis on actively discovering

which of these strategies work best for the teacher. Developmental activities used by these academics include experimenting with different teaching techniques, reflecting on the outcomes, and seeking feedback from students and colleagues. Feedback may be sought formally, through conducting student evaluations, or informally, by asking students or observing their reactions to classes, asking colleagues to comment on teaching materials, and so on. Such feedback is then combined with active self-reflection, which might involve thinking about what one is doing and how one can do it better, keeping a teaching journal, and other forms of self-evaluation. For example:

You don't pedantically assume that your aims and objectives have been successful until you get feedback, say in the class from students, on whether they think this method works... So, you get back the inputs and try to adjust accordingly. (Cultural studies, male, Level B, interview 3)

If you keep striving and keep searching for better ways, or keep assessing what you are doing, asking others to assess what you are doing, and therefore always having this kind of dialogue with students and with colleagues, and you keep up with the reading, then you do keep growing. And I think that gradually everything becomes more integrated and flows back and forth from one area to the other, and you become more experienced, and you should be able to know more clearly what works and what doesn't work. (Languages, female, Level B, interview 10)

The focus on active reflection on which teaching strategies work most effectively is strikingly different from the previous approach to teaching development. This includes a desire to continue improving and experimenting with strategies, even when existing strategies are working quite well. For example:

The [institutional standardised student surveys] I filled out ... you get a whole bunch of quantitative measures, right? You get it back, and it has little bar charts all over, an answer for each of the questions. Which I got back and they were mostly pretty good. And that was great fun, in a way. But what they didn't say is, you could improve by doing this, or these 10 people thought you were crap because. All I got was, most of these people think you are doing all right. I was not able to use that information to change the way I teach at all. (Information sciences, male, Level A, interview 2)

This category also represents the first time that student or peer evaluation of teaching is mentioned as a developmental strategy. In the previous category, student evaluations may have been conducted, but such feedback was used more as an indicator of success or lack of success in teaching, rather than as an active method of teaching development. Similarly, Category 3 included references to using observation of colleagues as one technique for expanding one's repertoire of teaching methods, but it did *not* include using colleagues for feedback or to help reflect on one's teaching. For example, *from Category 3*, 'Actually, I don't think I really talk to people about what they do ... It's more about keeping your ears open than about actually going out and asking people'.

Within the Category 4 focus on evaluation and reflection, indicators of what 'works' in teaching are evaluated in terms of student satisfaction and the teacher feeling comfortable with the way things are going, rather than in terms of student learning per se. For example:

I talk to students who have taken the course. I ask, which part would you like to read through from last year? Which part did you enjoy? Would you like to do more experimentation? Would you like to do more ...? This kind of feedback from students. Basically, I'm always taking it as what the students want. (Information sciences, male, Level A, interview 2)

*5. Teaching development as continually increasing one's understanding of what works and doesn't work for students, in order to become more effective in facilitating student learning*

In many ways, this category looks similar to the previous category, with a similar focus on discovering what works and doesn't work in teaching and learning situations. There is also a similar set of developmental strategies being used, including a strong focus on evaluative feedback and self-reflection. The qualitative difference is in the focus on student *learning* outcomes as the primary indicator of teaching effectiveness, rather than student *satisfaction* and teacher comfort (as in Category 4). For example:

Teaching a unit where people actually get something out of it, where they learn and come into contact with a lot of new and hopefully challenging ideas ... Where they understand all the material that is being presented ... And where they come out at the end of the course also with other skills, such as improved communication skills, improved writing and oral skills ... When people will all come to their tutorials and take away what you have taught them in this unit and apply it to all of their entire life, and also to other units that they might do. (Applied sciences, female, Level B, interview 5)

This is also reflected in different goals for students' response to teaching in Category 5 compared to previous categories. In earlier categories, academics might desire student respect, student interest in the subject, and for students to enjoy and/or be satisfied with their teaching. However, a qualitative difference emerges in Category 5, with student learning outcomes explicitly added to the range of desired student responses to teaching. This includes a strong focus on what students will take away from a course in the long term, rather than the focus on their immediate satisfaction with the course that was apparent in Category 4.

Category 5 represents the most complex and inclusive approach to developing as a teacher that emerged from the interview data. Concerns and strategies apparent in previous categories are also seen in this category, but with an additional focus on learning outcomes for the students as the ultimate indicator of teaching success. The following lengthy excerpt from one interview illustrates the inclusive nature of the developmental approach represented by Category 5:

(Social sciences, male, Level C, interview 13) I think that there is an experience component. There is a whole lot of very boring procedural matters, which do make a difference. The limits of giving a lecture in less than an hour and getting to the punch-line before the time runs out. I think that I started off doing well and I'm sure that I have improved with that kind of thing. The capacity, like finding the right pitch to deliver information, the best way to choose case studies, that kind of thing. I think all those things are partly experience based. [Illustrating an awareness of the key aspects of the phenomenon apparent in Category 2.]

By experience, I don't just mean doing it. It's quite apparent that two things exist. One is that in any [discipline] department I've been in, there are people who have very different capacities as a teacher ... I'd like to point out that it's not just doing the teaching. When I

was a postgraduate, several other postgraduates and I had long discussions about what were good teaching techniques. ... We used to score similar or different lectures we would hear. Then we would talk about them and say, this is a good way to do it and that isn't. At some level, I think I still do that, though I've fallen into some patterns ... So, your question was about how do you go about improving, and my answer is that you think about what you are doing and how you might do it better. [Illustrating an awareness of the key aspects of Categories 3 and 4.]

I always get good grades on the [institutional standardised student survey] things. I'm an average of just about six [out of seven], which statistically is pretty good. ... All they are saying is that you are doing okay. For me, there are probably two measures [of teaching success]. One is the degree of glassiness in the students' eyes. Are they paying attention, are they displaying some kind of facial characteristics that show that the light bulb has gone on and are they grasping what you are saying? Or are they bored and can't see the relevance? That's one thing. The other thing is the degree to which you get ongoing feedback ... What I think provides a useful measure is the quality of the students who are going on. Those who are doing honours, doing higher degrees, who you have had as undergraduates, for example. At a graduate level it's the quality of the theses that they produce ... My goal of teaching is to encourage people who are interested to pursue [the discipline]. A big improvement in teaching leads to that end. [Illustrating Category 5.]

#### *How approaches to teaching development reflect conceptions of teaching development*

As the conceptions of growing and developing as a teacher described in the introduction to this article (Åkerlind, 2003) are based on *the same interview sample*, the additional analyses presented here allow our understanding of academics' ways of experiencing teaching growth and development to be further elaborated, in the following ways (also see Table 1):

- a conception of teaching development as increasing comfort and confidence with teaching (Åkerlind, 2003) is accompanied by approaching one's teaching development through *either* building up a better knowledge of one's content in order to become more familiar with what to teach, *and/or* building up practical experience as a teacher in order to become more familiar with how to teach (present article);
- a conception of teaching development as increasing teaching skills, strategies and methods (Åkerlind, 2003) is accompanied by approaching one's teaching development by *either* building up a repertoire of teaching strategies in order to become more effective/skilful as a teacher, *and/or* finding out which teaching strategies do and don't work for the teacher in order to become more effective as a teacher (present article);
- a conception of teaching development as increasing student learning and development (Åkerlind, 2003) is accompanied by approaching teaching development by continually increasing one's understanding of what works and doesn't work for students in order to become more effective in facilitating student learning (present article).

These findings show the internal relationship one would expect between academics' conceptions or ways of understanding teaching development, (i.e. what they think it

is) and their ways of approaching teaching development (i.e. how they go about it). The more limited an academic's conception of what growing and developing as a teacher can mean, the more limited their ways of approaching their own teaching development.

**Discussion**

On the basis of Marton and Booth's (1997) analysis of key structural components of the experience of learning (see Figure 1), I would like to propose a similar analysis of key structural components of the experience of teaching development. This provides a useful model for mapping associated constraints on academics' potential for developing as a teacher. Within this model, the intentional attitude that academics hold towards their growth and development as a teacher, that is, what they experience their development as aimed at, becomes all important. Just as with learning, developing as a teacher has to have an object.

Following Marton and Booth's model, developing as a teacher can be represented as having both a direct and an indirect object, intertwined with an act. The act of development represents the way in which an academic *undertakes* their development as a teacher. The indirect object of development represents the type of *capabilities* the academic is trying to develop, and the direct object, the *content* of their development.

The research reported here has focused on academics' approaches to developing as a university teacher, principally mapping the indirect object and act of teaching development. This supplements earlier research on conceptions of developing as a teacher (Åkerlind, 2003), which principally mapped the direct object of teaching development. The combined findings of the two studies are represented in Table 1.

At the same time, based on my interview data, the act of development may be further elaborated into a series of more specific strategies (see Table 2). While these should not be regarded as prescriptive, they provide a more concrete sense of how

Table 1. Structural components of academics' experience of teaching development

Indirect object (Desired capabilities from development)	Act (How development is undertaken)	Direct object (Content/desired outcomes of development)
<i>Aim to:</i> Become more familiar with what to teach	<i>By:</i> Increasing content knowledge	<i>In order to:</i> Achieve greater comfort and confidence as a teacher
Become more familiar with how to teach	Acquiring practical experience	<i>As above</i>
Become more skilful as a teacher	Accumulating teaching strategies	Develop a repertoire of skills and strategies
Become more effective as a teacher	Finding out what works, from the teacher's perspective	<i>As above</i>
Become more effective in facilitating students' learning	Finding out what works, from the students' perspective	Improve student learning and development



Table 2. Developmental strategies associated with different developmental intentions

Intentional act of development	Illustrative developmental strategies
Increasing content knowledge	Reading disciplinary literature, conducting research, collecting up-to-date materials and examples
Acquiring practical experience	Engaging in teaching
Accumulating teaching strategies	As above, plus attending courses/workshops, reading educational literature, observing teaching colleagues
Finding out what works, from the teacher's perspective	As above, plus experimenting with teaching methods, seeking feedback on student satisfaction, reflecting on the outcomes
Finding out what works, from the students' perspective	As above, plus seeking feedback on student learning, including reflecting on student learning outcomes apparent from their assessment

academics' developmental intentions are put into practice than do the more abstract description of acts on their own.

Based on Table 2, we can see that it is only when academics' understanding of teaching development comes to include the development of a repertoire of teaching strategies (Category 3) that they would be interested in educational development courses or workshops, and only when their understanding comes to include reflecting on what works and doesn't work in their teaching (Category 4) that the emphasis on reflective practice, including preparation of teaching portfolios, that is so common in educational development courses would be valued.

These findings may help explain the polarised nature of the current debate about the value of courses and qualifications in university teaching for academics. In UK higher education, in particular, where such courses and/or qualifications have been made increasingly compulsory for new academic appointments, bitter descriptions of courses as being a waste of time have alternated with testaments as to their value (Lindsay, 2004; Lipsett, 2005). A possible explanation for this variation in views may lie in the different understandings as to the nature of teaching development presented here.

Of course, any compulsory course is likely to put academics off, but this only partially explains the negative reaction of some participants. An additional explanation is that academics who believe that the best route to improving teaching is to focus on becoming more familiar with what and how to teach, through increasing content knowledge and acquiring practical experience (Categories 1 and 2), must logically see no purpose to such courses. From this perspective, staying in touch with the research literature in their field and gaining teaching experience would always be seen as more valuable for teaching development. This particular perspective would also lead to the common argument that experience as a teacher makes participation in such courses redundant.

At the same time, academics who see the best route to improving as a teacher lying with building up a repertoire of teaching strategies and finding out which of these strategies work best for them (Categories 3 and 4) may value teaching development



courses as such, but only if they focus on teaching methods in an instrumental fashion. This means that the only academics likely to value a theoretically-oriented course on teaching and learning in higher education are those who see (or come to see while undertaking the course) the best route to improving as a teacher as becoming more effective in facilitating students' learning (Category 5).

As further illustrated by Nicholls (2005), in her study of new lecturers' constructions of learning and teaching:

Those who associated teaching with the transmission of knowledge ... were most anxious to develop more sophisticated skills to facilitate the transmission. Those who associated teaching with facilitating learning were anxious to understand and conceptualise the learning process, to help their students. (p. 621)

Furthermore, in any course on teaching, variation in academics' understanding of what developing as a teacher can mean must interact with variation in educational developers' understanding of teaching development. There is no reason to expect developers to have a uniform view of teaching development, and, in the way of human nature, every reason to expect them not to. For instance, Gibbs and Coffey (2000) found a wide divergence in the goals of developers conducting training programmes for academic teachers. Programme aims varied from focusing on helping academics to develop key behavioural skills for teaching competence, to focusing on developing academics' skills in reflective practice in order to facilitate a process of ongoing self development, and to developing academics' understandings of teaching and learning as a means to improve students' learning. These three categories of *developer* goals bear a striking resemblance to Categories 3–5 in this article, of *academics'* views of the nature of teaching development.

The resulting opportunities for variable matches and mismatches between academics' and developers' views of how best to approach teaching development are obvious. However, as illustrated in this article, such mismatches may represent not just variation in needs and expectations, but variation in understandings of what developing as a university teacher can mean.

The strong implication of this article is that, from an education development perspective, a vital consideration in teaching development is academics' understanding of what teaching and developing as a teacher can mean under varying circumstances. To be effective, development support must be tailored to individual academics' intentions and understandings with regard to teaching and teaching development, *either* by limiting the support offered to align with their understandings *or* by expanding their understandings to enable a broader range of support to appear desirable. This means simultaneously working on tailoring any support provided to match academics' current understandings of teaching and teaching development, especially in situations of short-term contact, as well as taking whatever opportunities arise to expand their understandings, especially in situations of long-term contact.

The most likely situation of long-term contact is the teaching development course setting that has already been mentioned. For example, in the accredited course on teaching and learning in higher education that I convene, as part of the Australian

National University's Graduate Certificate and Master's in Higher Education, I have a particular focus on providing opportunities for conceptual change or, more precisely, conceptual expansion. A full description of such opportunities, and the phenomenographic epistemological perspective on the nature of conceptual expansion which underlie their design, would require a separate article. But, in brief, I attempt to provide opportunities for participants to notice conceptually challenging occurrences, such as that academics with equivalent levels of content knowledge and teaching experience may not be equally good teachers (to help encourage a shift beyond Categories 1 and 2), that students of equivalent ability or aptitude may learn different things from the same course, that teachers implementing the same method or technique may do so with quite different intentions and outcomes (to help encourage a shift beyond Category 3), and that teaching methods that appear highly successful to the teacher may not lead to their desired learning outcomes for students (to help encourage a shift beyond Category 4).

Particularly effective ways of providing these opportunities include asking academics to interview some of their students about their approaches to learning and what they are trying to achieve in their learning; asking academics to interview some of their colleagues about their approaches to teaching and what they are trying to achieve in their teaching, introducing academics to some of the data from my own and other researchers' studies that illustrate variation in students' and teachers' views of the same teaching and learning phenomena, and guiding academics in conducting their own action research or action learning projects.

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