CHAPTER 1

Toward Social Constructivism in Preservice Education

> [E]ducation is not an affair of "telling" and being told, but an active and constructive process.
>
> —John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*

As stated in the introduction, we believe social constructivism can provide crucial direction for preservice education and we see evidence of it in the strong, innovative programs described in this book. But what exactly is meant by this term? As Richardson (1997) notes, constructivist teaching is not "a monolithic, agreed-upon concept" (p. 3). It is often barely understood, or actually misunderstood. For example, some identify it just as an activity approach, overlooking its role in empowering learners and critiquing prevailing ideas and social practices. Others understand it as unstructured "discovery learning," where anything goes. Still others interpret it as a highly subjective and individualistic process that neglects experience of the world and collaboration with others. Misunderstandings of these kinds give constructivism a bad name and create obstacles to gaining support and resources for constructivist teaching and teacher education; they also make implementation of the approach difficult even under ideal conditions.

In this chapter, through discussion and examples, we will attempt to clarify the nature of social constructivism, and we will continue to illustrate it throughout the book, especially with reference to preservice programming. In exploring social constructivism, we will draw on past interpretations of constructivism, notably, those of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, and also bring insights from more recent writers on sociocultural theory, such as Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty. By its own tenets, social constructivism is constantly changing and open to a variety of interpretations. We will present here our own understanding of the approach; and, in constructivist spirit, we invite readers to develop *their* interpretation, in part in response to ours.

However, we will argue strongly for our interpretation, because we believe much is at stake and some ways of conducting teacher education are better than others. On our understanding, social constructivism is an approach that

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encourages all members of a learning community to present their ideas strongly, while remaining open to the ideas of others. It is a passionate approach, involving the whole person: thought, emotion, and action. It is not a relativistic outlook, where just any position will do. Like Nuthall (2002), we think teacher input has a major role within a social constructivist framework. However, we also stress that students, too, must have a major role, with greater opportunity than they commonly have to give input, discuss, and reflect in class. Just how much weight to give to individual, teacher, and peer input respectively must be the subject of ongoing study and debate.

Social constructivism is not just an interesting theoretical idea; it can help significantly with challenges and tensions we face in teacher education today. For example, preservice educators are familiar with the problem of the gap between the university classroom and the school. Fostering a progressive approach among student teachers despite the cover-and-test culture in schools today presents a huge challenge. There is also the crisis of a high attrition rate among teachers. The gulf between academic knowledge and popular culture is a further problem. We believe a social constructivist approach to preservice education has potential to assist with these pressing difficulties, as well as others. Our main concern in this book is to consider how this might be done.

A central reason for fostering social constructivism in preservice education is to help make teaching a more attractive and respected profession. That will not happen if we return to a transmission approach. We are constantly impressed with the very high caliber of people who decide to become teachers. They have strong academic backgrounds, are vibrant and outgoing, and have a passion for interacting with students and helping them academically and in other ways. At the same time, schooling is under siege, conditions for teachers are often frustrating and demeaning, and the level of burnout is high. While improving working conditions and increasing resources for teachers must be priorities, we believe high-quality preservice education is also essential to enhance the experience of teachers and their students.

We are appalled when we see universities siphoning off funds earned by teacher education to use for other purposes, and when we hear of proposals to reduce preservice programs to 3 or 4 months. Granted, we teacher educators have not always done the best job possible. But teacher education is so vital in the whole education enterprise that we should devote more rather than less time, resources, and effort to it. To enhance teacher education significantly, however, we need a better sense of direction. As Sosniak (1999) says, "we need to consider redeveloping a curriculum for teacher education more consistent with what we value" (p. 200). We believe that a more fully developed and implemented social constructivism can take us toward what we value for ourselves, our young people, and society as a whole.

But despite the promise, there is a serious question whether a social constructivist approach is generally feasible in preservice education. As teacher

educators face larger classes, heavier teaching loads, higher research and publishing expectations, low teacher morale in schools, and widespread government pressure toward transmission education, how can we implement social constructivism? Student teachers themselves often question the viability of such an approach, under current conditions.

It seems to us the approach is feasible, given that it is already being practiced in many places. But we would agree that if it is to be implemented more widely and sustained over time, greater support is needed from schools of education, the university as a whole, and beyond. The exploration of social constructivism that follows is intended to provide a firmer basis both for gaining such support and for implementing the approach.

OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

Social constructivism is a very complex approach; throughout the book we will continue to attempt to define and illustrate it. In this chapter, we will introduce the paradigm. In the first section we will outline what we regard as its key principles. As we give our interpretation of each principle, we will cite relevant authors and discuss briefly the implications of the principle for preservice education, presenting one or two examples from our own program at OISE/University of Toronto. In the second section of the chapter we will further clarify the nature of the approach by describing recent social constructivist trends in teacher education.

Knowledge is constructed by learners. All constructivists, whatever their distinctive emphasis, agree that learners construct their knowledge. Hence the term constructivism. As Dewey (1916) said, "education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process" (p. 46). Even when we use other people's ideas, we assess and modify them rather than just absorbing them in a preset form.

Constructing our own knowledge is necessary in part because that is how the mind works. We cannot grasp new ideas without linking them to existing concepts. According to Dewey (1916), "no thought, no idea, can possibly be conveyed as an idea from one person to another." Learners must interpret new ideas in the context of their present interests and understandings if they are to have thoughts at all (p. 188). For example, if we are considering for the first time the idea that teacher–student dialogue is important for learning, we need our previous concepts of "teacher" and "student" as a basis for pondering this insight. At a later stage we may modify these concepts to make them consistent with the new insight, but this again will be a gradual process, building on earlier concepts.

Another reason why we must construct our own knowledge is to ensure that it is useful. From a constructivist viewpoint, the primary purpose of

knowledge is to help humans function in the world, not to describe universal reality (Dewey, 1929/1960; Rorty, 1979). According to Vadeboncoeur (1997), Piaget maintained that "[l]earners construct ways to make sense of experiences, and will continue to use those constructions as long as they work" (p. 23). Ideas that "work" are ones that are suited to our needs and circumstances and so take us in appropriate directions. For example, our concept of good literature should lead us to works we find interesting and enjoyable and can discuss with our friends. More sophisticated ideas about literature may eventually have a valuable impact on our lives, but at a particular stage they may be alienating and even discourage us from reading.

The fact that we construct our knowledge does not mean it is just an individual, subjective matter, without external reference. On the contrary, our knowledge is heavily influenced by experience of life and the world (Foucault, 1998; Phillips, 1995) and by dialogue with others (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1932). Even direct instruction, commonly associated with transmission pedagogy, can play an important role in constructivist learning (Brophy, 2002). But while these external influences are essential, we must adapt ideas to a considerable extent if they are to have meaning and value in our lives.

A key implication of the constructivist paradigm for teacher education is that student teachers should have time and encouragement to reflect on what they are learning. Because of the short duration of preservice programs there is a tendency to think we must "give them the theory" while we have the chance, leaving them to work out the implications as they teach. This is an unfortunate approach, however, not only because it models transmission pedagogy but because it gives the students inadequate opportunity to assess and adapt theory (Fosnot, 1989; Tom, 1997; Wideen & Lemma, 1999). In our own preservice program, which is just 9 months long, we build in as much time as possible for personal reflection, discussion of implications, and expression of alternative views. Sometimes students complain that there is too much reflection and discussion. They would like us just to tell them what to teach at each grade level and which activities to use, believing this would be more efficient and would prepare them better. But we feel that one of our main tasks in the program is to encourage them to move away from this passive view of learning.

With encouragement and support, our students begin to develop a teaching style that fits their distinctive needs and talents. For example, those who are especially energized by interacting with pupils and helping them in a variety of ways make this a major emphasis in their teaching, while those who gain much satisfaction from intellectual engagement and seeing students grasp key ideas place this at the center of their pedagogy. Both types of goals are important, of course, but differences in emphasis are necessary if these new teachers are to find their work fulfilling and give maximum help to their students.

A more specific example of individual construction of pedagogy is seen in our students' approach to technology in education. Those who have had many positive experiences with technology tend to make it central to their view of education, seeing topics, strategies, and even goals through this lens. By contrast, those who are uncomfortable with technology typically think of teaching in terms of discussion, reading, art activities, and so forth, with technology a discrete skill used on particular occasions. Although it is important for student teachers to integrate technology as much as possible, allowing differences of degree facilitates optimal teacher development and performance.

Knowledge is experience-based. A further reason why learners should construct knowledge is to utilize their rich experience. The knowledge developed by academics is usually too abstract, as it stands, to be useful in everyday situations. As Dewey (1938) said:

> [A]ll principles by themselves are abstract. They become concrete only in the consequences which result from their application. . . . [E]verything depends upon the interpretation given them as they are put into practice in the school and the home. (p. 20)

Learners must bring their detailed knowledge to bear in interpreting general principles (Schön, 1983).

Ordinary learners (as distinct from experts) not only reinterpret existing concepts and principles, they frequently develop new ones based on their experience of the world. Although they use different tools and language from experts, they often investigate the same phenomena and make a substantial contribution to knowledge (Rorty, 1989). For example, ordinary people develop complex principles and strategies for relating to fellow family members, even though this is also the domain of moral philosophers, family psychologists, and so on. They may in fact devise major new approaches to family life, resulting in changes in the conception of the family. Such changes are not mere addenda to expert theory; rather, they involve a basic recentering of thought (Derrida, 1972/1982). In discussing the field of education, Carr (1995) points to "the extensive theoretical powers that educational practitioners already possess" and the fact that basic pedagogical theory is often "generated out of the experience of practitioners" (pp. 34–35).

This view of the close connection between knowledge and experience is relevant to teacher education. In theory classes in our preservice program we rely heavily on the experience of student teachers. Although we too have past and current experience of schooling, the sheer range of the students' experiential background offers a rich resource. A topic raised recently in a School and Society class concerned how to teach small groups of students withdrawn from regular class for special literacy help. Drawing on their experiences in the first practicum, the student teachers provided many examples of the varied attitudes and ability levels of these students, conflicting directives from inside

and outside the school about what to do with them, and effective strategies for helping each type of student. These examples shed light on the complexity of the issues and resulted in a highly nuanced approach to the topic.

The student teachers sometimes take a position that leads to a major restructuring of our ideas about teaching and learning. For example, one year we decided to have an early class on the "stages of teacher development" from "novice" through "competent" to "expert" level. We thought it would give students a sense of direction in their growth as teachers and pride in the high attainments of their profession. However, almost the whole cohort objected vociferously to this stage model. They saw it as stereotyping, demeaning for them, and likely to stifle innovative practice in their teaching placements. Their reaction led us to abandon this way of talking and search for a more appropriate model of differences between new and experienced teachers.

Learning is social. The ideas discussed so far apply to constructivism in general. The principle that learning is social, on the other hand, relates especially to *social* constructivism. Although Piaget stressed social factors (e.g., Piaget, 1932), Vygotsky and later writers developed this perspective further and in new ways. Like Piaget, they noted the importance of dialogue with others in knowledge construction. Vygotsky in particular spoke of the importance of teacher–student dialogue, and the need for teachers to stimulate learning within a "zone" consistent with each student's current level of development (Vygotsky, 1978). Adding to Piaget, however, social constructivists have explored the direct impact of language and culture on learners, an impact that often occurs without dialogue and beyond learners' conscious control (Barthes, 1970/1982; Foucault, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).

Many social constructivists are concerned mainly with the effects of the larger society on knowledge formation; others focus especially on the role of "learning communities" created within educational institutions. The impact of the larger society is often negative and accidental. By contrast, a well-developed class community can have a positive influence in a broadly anticipated direction (Brophy, 2002; Dewey, 1916). For example, such a community can give strong social and emotional support, thus enabling learners to take risks and develop ownership of their learning. It can also provide opportunities for democratic dialogue during which the ideas presented by teachers are modified (Benhabib, 1990). Along these lines, Wells (1994) describes Vygotsky's social constructivism in terms of a two-way process:

> As the learner appropriates the knowledge and procedures encountered in interaction with others, he or she transforms them, constructing his or her own personal version. But in the process, he or she is also transformed. . . . (p. 8)

The knowledge teachers possess is important for fruitful dialogue (Nuthall, 2002), but the knowledge students bring to the classroom is also essential.

Of course, all the social learning that takes place in educational institutions is by no means positive. Such institutions often mirror problematic features of the larger society and add others of their own (Bourdieu, 1977; Lyotard, 1984). Dewey (1916) spoke of the need for the school to be a "purified" environment, with a higher level of sociability, personal security, and stimulus for growth than is commonly experienced. Social constructivists advocate forming learning communities that are not only nurturing and supportive but also engage in constant critique of social and educational institutions.

We have observed the positive impact of a learning community in our preservice program (Beck & Kosnik, 2001). Because the student teachers feel secure in the community, they make very frank comments to faculty about such matters as the content and methodology of our courses, the texts we use, our views on particular topics, the timing of assignments, and evaluation methods for practice teaching. They also share with us and their peers their early doubts about being a teacher arising from the rigors of practice teaching and the less than ideal conditions in schools, and specific difficulties they are experiencing in teaching, notably with classroom management. These types of sharing give rise to dialogue that is instructive for both students and faculty.

All aspects of a person are connected. On a social constructivist view, knowledge is dependent not only on social interaction, as discussed previously, but on all other aspects of the person: attitudes, emotions, values, and actions. The paradigm is strongly *holistic*. Dewey argued continually against dualisms in thought and life, in particular the "opposition of flesh and spirit" (Dewey, 1934/1980, p. 20). Similarly, Barthes (1977), Foucault (1998), and Derrida (1967/1978) have stressed connections between knowledge, pleasure, ethics, aesthetics, the body, and human action. In our view, constructivists in education have sometimes given a disproportionate emphasis to knowledge formation within *disciplines*. While the discipline context is very important, knowledge ultimately has meaning within a set of values (Sternberg, 2003) or indeed a way of life. Students in school need extensive opportunity and support to develop their whole way of life and bring this to bear systematically on their academic learning.

One aspect of this holistic perspective is recognition of the connection between knowledge and popular culture. Schooling is often seen as overcoming the negative influence of popular culture, such as TV, movies, comic books, popular music, and fashion. However, on a social constructivist view both academic knowledge and popular culture can have either a negative or positive impact. Both can seduce or bring insight, indoctrinate or enhance life. Social constructivists minimize the contrast between the academic and popular domains (Barthes, 1970/1982; Derrida, 1967/1978; Rorty, 1989). For education, this means supporting expression and discussion of popular culture in the classroom and critiquing academic knowledge in light of popular culture, as well as the converse.

In our preservice program we encourage student teachers to express many aspects of themselves—to "be themselves"—within the preservice program. For example, students who are parents bring that part of their life to the community, talking about their situation and how it affects their personal and professional experience. Similarly, students who are athletes or musicians tell us about their activities in these areas, and we often attend their competitions and performances. We find this has a positive impact not only on these individuals but also on the rest of the cohort, helping them see the connection between teaching and family life, the body, aesthetic life, and so on. It helps humanize their approach to teaching.

We also encourage our student teachers to be up-front about their involvement with popular culture: the internet, video games, rock music, popular dance, and so on. From the beginning, the getting-to-know-you activities explore such interests and this continues at the retreat, on the cohort internet conference, and at social events. We do not want them to see teaching or the preservice program as just concerned with the academic or "serious" side of life. In the celebratory activities at the end of the year, these popular elements are apparent as the graduating teachers present humorous and revealing skits and video clips about their experience in the program.

Learning communities should be inclusive and equitable. Several of the principles noted so far, such as the need to tailor knowledge to people's lives and the social nature of learning, point toward inclusiveness and equity in learning. Dewey and Piaget stressed inclusion within the learning community and helping children develop a sense of dignity and their own ideas and way of life. Later theorists have explored these themes more fully, advocating a strongly critical perspective. Barthes (1970/1982), Bourdieu (1977), Foucault (1997), and Lyotard (1984) describe how established culture and knowledge often oppress non-mainstream groups; they call for systematic analysis and criticism to reduce these effects. Derrida (1990) emphasizes the responsibility of institutions to acknowledge the difference of "the other" and work to support people in constructing reality from their distinctive point of view. Rorty (1985) proposes the formation of inclusive communal groups with a strong sense of solidarity.

In our preservice program we establish and model an inclusive community, and we have found that student teachers respond well to such an approach (Beck & Kosnik, 2001). We have observed a remarkable level of caring toward all members of the cohort community, including those of different gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Within a close community, student teachers get to know one another and develop a "we" outlook that generally reduces barriers existing in the larger society. Moreover, they quickly see the relevance of this experience for their own teaching, coming to regard building inclusive communities as one of the most important aspects of their

role. While they will continue to encounter prejudice and discrimination of various kinds in "the real world," we believe this experience of a community that is relatively inclusive and is trying to move further in that direction will be of help to them both personally and professionally. It will be a memorable experience of a different approach to interpersonal relationships and community life that has application within education and beyond.

Every year in our program we have at least one or two students who comment that they could not have survived the preservice experience without the acceptance and support of their peers and the faculty team. These have included, for example, women with young children, unmarried mothers, students in severe financial difficulties, and students with a history of abuse in their upbringing. While it might be argued that some of these people will have difficulty managing in the even tougher early years of teaching, in our experience they often blossom and become strong in the program and go on to be very successful teachers. Furthermore, they bring significantly different perspectives to the cohort, as they will as teachers after graduation. We believe it is crucially important to encourage such people to enter preservice education and support them strongly while they are there. A social constructivist program is well suited to achieving these goals.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST TRENDS IN PRESERVICE EDUCATION

As mentioned earlier, innovations have already occurred in a social constructivist direction in preservice education, especially in the past couple of decades (Richardson, 1997); precedents exist from which one can learn in pursuing this line of thought and practice. In later chapters we will give detailed examples of programs that have developed such an approach. Here we present just an outline of recent trends in preservice education to illustrate further the general concept of social constructivism. We begin the discussion of each trend by noting the particular features of social constructivism it embodies.

A life history approach to teaching. Lortie (1975) noted how new teachers frequently teach the way they were taught. Increasingly in preservice programs the previous life experiences of student teachers, including their prior schooling, are being treated as relevant. Through a variety of activities students reflect on their experiences of life and learning and relate them to their views on education. This approach is constructivist in several ways. It acknowledges that new ideas must be based in part on old ones, and hence learning to teach is a gradual process rather than a sudden initiation. It recognizes that knowledge must make sense in terms of a person's whole way of life: one cannot separate the professional from the personal, the academic from the everyday. And it accepts the contribution of one's rich prior experience to knowing how to teach.

Explicitly stating that her preservice teaching is grounded in Vygotsky's thought, Samaras (1998) describes how students in her program "examine their past schooling experiences and beliefs about teaching, and negotiate and reconstruct meanings about teaching after embodying the voices of others" (p. 64). She presents as an illustration her "education-related life history" assignment:

> This assignment asks students to write about the following: how they came to the decision to be a teacher, their notions and doubts about teaching, important people and critical incidents that influenced their decision to teach, and implications of their school experiences for their notions of teaching. I open the class discussion by talking about my early schooling. . . . I ask students to share the highlights of their stories. (p. 65).

Knowles, Cole, and Presswood (1994) stress the extent to which student teachers already have relevant knowledge when they enter the preservice program. They go so far as to say that student teachers "are themselves teacher educators," whose experiences should be "the starting points for reflection, discussion, and inquiry" (p. viii). Preservice programs should reveal inquiry into "self, contexts, and relationships" as an essential and lifelong aspect of professional development: among other things, such inquiry fosters personal and professional empowerment (p. viii). One of the forms of autobiographical writing the authors advocate is "personal history accounts":

> Each of us possesses personal histories that are rich and intensely interesting. By personal or life history accounts we mean stories of your experiences of learning in formal and informal settings . . . and the meanings you attribute to those experiences. . . . Personal history accounts are not intended to be exclusively chronological records of events but, rather, to be examinations of your efforts to become a teacher within the context of your educational life. . . . Some potentially useful topics to explore and to start you writing include: your decision to become a teacher, teachers' work, visions of teachers and teaching, outstanding teachers and their influence on you, metaphors for teaching and working with students in classrooms. . . . (pp. 22–23, 29)

Schoonmaker (2002), in her significantly titled book *"Growing Up" Teaching: From Personal Knowledge to Professional Practice*, maintains that learning to teach "should be recognized as a process of continuous reconstruction of experience" (p. x), and that "all learning—including that about theory and its relation to curricular practice and classroom/social control—passes through the individual's mental and emotional filters (pp. 57–58). She emphasizes, however, that student teachers bring both positive and problematic understandings of schooling from their earlier experiences. For example, one student whom she studied in depth came with a sense that schooling should be "fun and rewarding" and "fair" to students, but also with a rather traditional con-

ception of appropriate teaching content and activities. She advocates respecting both types of views in a preservice program. The positive ones—for example, that learning should be fun—need to be qualified and deepened, and the problematic ones should similarly be used as starting points for deconstruction and reconstruction.

School-based research by student teachers. In addition to reflection on past life experiences and developments, many preservice programs have student teachers conduct research in schools and classrooms. This component is constructivist in that it implies that teachers should build their own theory and practice of teaching based on their experiences and observations, rather than just applying the findings and principles of university-based researchers. It also underscores an inquiry approach to teaching, since it sees a teacher's pedagogy continuing to evolve over the years through constant reassessment. Further, such an approach reflects the nonauthoritarian outlook of constructivism since the research typically involves listening to students and taking account of their views.

Action research is one of the main forms of research incorporated into preservice programs. Ross (1987) has been a pioneer in this development. She points out that, because campus courses are often rather separate from the practicum, practice teaching can reinforce a transmission approach to teaching:

> While [student teachers'] attitudes may become more progressive as they take coursework in education . . . their experiences in public schools during their internships encourage them to focus on learning "what works" with little consideration of broader educational objectives and principles. . . . By the time most students complete their final field experiences they have become "passive technicians who merely learn to execute pre-packaged instructional programs" (Goodman, 1986, p. 112). (Ross, 1987, p. 131)

By contrast, having action research as a component in the program can help student teachers "view teaching as integrally related to research and as a process that involves inquiry and experimentation" (p. 147).

Zeichner (1990) reports that many recent innovations in preservice education are designed to prepare "teachers who are researchers of their practice" (p. 115). These innovations vary in precise form, but they all use the practicum "as a site for furthering teaching as a form of research and experimentation" (p. 115). Liston and Zeichner (1991) describe the inquiry component of the elementary teacher education program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, which was initiated to try to overcome the preoccupation of student teachers with "mastery of teaching skills within the classroom" to the neglect of the goals those skills are meant to serve (p. 166). This inquiry component includes three different kinds of activities: action research, ethnographic studies, and curriculum analysis. The authors outline the action research element as follows:

> Student teachers spend a portion of their weekly seminar time discussing and reacting to one another's developing projects, and they prepare written accounts of the evolution of their projects at the end of the semester. The university supervisor and sometimes the cooperating teacher, as well, seek to facilitate students' inquiries by reacting to them along the way. . . . The university supervisor frequently structures opportunities both for student teachers to learn about and discuss various research strategies (e.g., collecting data about pupil learning) and for student teachers to support their peers' research efforts. Some of the student projects have included experimentation with different grouping procedures within the classroom to assess the effects of alternative strategies for maintaining pupil involvement, examinations of a student teacher's behavior toward high- and low-ability groups, and the careful monitoring of efforts to introduce cooperative learning into the classroom. (pp. 170–71)

Apart from action research projects there are other activities and assignments that emphasize a research or inquiry approach to teaching, such as individual child studies, studies of a particular school, and reflection papers based in part on classroom experiences. For example, in the MET program at the University of Hawaii, an assignment called "Portrait of the School" is designed to help preservice students be more than passive observers in their practicum school. Students use qualitative research strategies to explore the complexities of schools and schooling, looking beyond their classroom to the school as a whole (Beck, Freese, & Kosnik, 2004). Samaras (2002) describes another type of project focused on the dilemmas student teachers face in implementing theory and skills learned in their university courses.

> [This project] structures the development of preservice teachers' personal decision making and action in dynamic teaching situations. . . . Through inquiry into dilemmas found in practice, preservice teachers discuss actions and strategies that are based on professional knowledge, careful observation, and reflection. They are asked to consider the consequences, both positive and negative, of their actions. They write about their dilemmas, multiple perspectives, and alternative action plans. . . . During the practicum and student teacher seminars, students make meaning of their individual observations through much dialogue with their peers and professors. (p. 23)

Self-study of teacher education practices. Zeichner (1998) observes that research on teacher education is increasingly conducted by teacher educators themselves, a trend that in his view is very positive: "The birth of the self-study in teacher education movement around 1990 has been probably the single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research" (p. 19). The term self-study in this context has a complex meaning, including personal involvement in research, personal narrative, critical inquiry, respect for experience, and a collaborative approach (Beck, Freese, & Kosnik, 2004).

Although in a sense this trend is not in preservice programs but rather in research on such programs, it indicates that preservice faculty have adopted a social constructivist approach to their own learning about teaching, and this in turn will be reflected in their preservice teaching and programming. As faculty research their practice they gain a fuller understanding of what teacher research means and so are better equipped to help their students move in this direction. Further, their modeling of this approach gives their students concrete examples of how it is done. It also assures the students that such an approach to teaching will be rewarded—and not merely talked about—in the program, thus encouraging them to take an experimental approach in the practicum.

At Queens' University, Russell (2002) conducted self-study research on his role as a "faculty liaison" during the initial 9-week preservice practicum, where he had the dual mandate of supporting student teachers in their placement and enhancing school–university partnerships. He notes that he had a prior assumption that "simply being in the school" would lead to success in the role. However, "[p]ersonal experience and self-study of that experience have taught me how much more complex the matter is" (p. 74). As is the practice in constructivist teaching generally, a major component of his inquiry was observing the students closely and seeking their views; the opinions of school personnel were also solicited.

The study took place over 5 years, from 1997 to 2002. In the program year 1999–2000, for example, Russell made 7 full-day visits to each of the two schools for which he was responsible. There were 13 student teachers in these schools, and he sought their feedback. He commented:

> To help the 13 candidates in 1999–2000 better understand their first action research experience, I explained that I would conduct action research of my own to better understand my contributions to their professional learning. Some showed little interest in providing me with "backtalk" . . . while others were quite willing to do so. (p. 77)

One thing Russell learned that year was that "one size does not fit all"—the differing situations and personal characteristics of student teachers require an individualized approach (pp. 77–78). Another finding was that "most candidates place greatest value on my watching them teach full lessons and providing detailed comments and suggestions" (p. 78). A further theme that emerged from the student interviews was that "[p]ositive reinforcement is as much, if not more, beneficial than negative reinforcement—tell us what we are doing correctly or offer suggestions for improvement" (p. 78). In response to these findings Russell made significant changes to his practice the following year, notably ensuring that wherever possible he observed a full lesson and then discussed it with the student teacher.

In conclusion Russell states that the research made him reconsider his earlier view "that visits to schools to observe preservice candidates are, in and

of themselves, valuable to all concerned" (p. 84). More generally, "[t]his self-study of my own efforts to learn the role of faculty liaison over a five-year period has been productive both practically and conceptually." It helped him see that "genuine partnerships may emerge from a base of significant time spent with candidates and experienced teachers, unpacking not only observations of candidates' teaching but also our fundamental premises about teachers' professional learning" (pp. 85–86).

Berry and Loughran (2002) describe self-study research conducted during the development of a new preservice course at Monash University. A central focus of the research, in keeping with their social constructivist approach, was how to build trust in student teachers so they will take risks in class. Establishing trust is usually seen as a gradual process, but they believed it could be achieved from the beginning provided the instructors immediately showed their own willingness to be vulnerable. As they closely observed the impact of their intervention on the students and each other, they became more aware of the complexities of this aspect of teacher education. Yes, a high degree of trust and risk taking can be achieved at an early stage; but "there are still differences between the teacher educator and the student teacher that can inhibit learning through these experiences" (p. 28). Moreover, the vulnerability required of instructors to reach this goal is very challenging for some. As Berry noted in her journal:

> When I heard the students say in response to [Zoe's] teaching "I felt belittled when you asked us to write notes," and "I felt afraid to put my ideas forward when I heard how you responded to others," it . . . reminded me . . . how vulnerable a position the teacher is in. No matter how much we support the idea of professional critique, it can still be pretty demoralizing to hear what some students are actually thinking and feeling. (p. 25)

This research in the first year of the course led to substantial changes in the second year. For example, as the coordinator of the course Berry began to take more account of the needs and concerns of her fellow instructors, in addition to those of the student teachers.

Cohort groupings and faculty teams. Increasingly today preservice students are being grouped into relatively small cohorts, with a view to enhancing collaboration and community in the program. This shift is due in part to Lortie's (1975) observation that teachers are not adequately "socialized" into the profession, and Goodlad's finding that, typically, there is not "a process through which students planning to teach are socialized together" (Goodlad, 1990b, p. 28). In the 29 universities Goodlad studied, the norm was that "students scarcely knew each other when they came together for the first time in a foundations course. The group assembled was not homogeneous with respect to the goal of teaching, and in no way was it a cohort group, aware of being together in the class of 1992" (Goodlad, 1990a, p. 207).

In the cohort programs emerging over the past two decades, reduced size is achieved either by limiting enrolment or by dividing the students into subgroups (Howey, 1996). A related development is to have the students in a cohort engage in many of their course and field activities together, under the guidance of a team of faculty who work together to achieve an optimal degree of integration both between campus courses and between the campus program and the practicum. This approach is social constructivist most obviously because it emphasizes the social and communal dimension of learning. It is also holistic, helping to integrate different aspects of students' experience, notably the social with the professional and the theoretical with the practical. Further, it provides a solid framework for establishing an inclusive approach to teaching and learning in the preservice program.

A longstanding example of a cohort and faculty team approach is found at the University of Utah, where such programs were begun in the early 1980s (initially at the secondary level, later at the elementary level as well). The Utah initiative "grew out of a perception of the disconnectedness of individual courses and the feeling that there was really no 'program' in any sense of the word" (Arends & Winitzky, 1996, p. 546). Under the arrangement, teacher candidates are organized into cohorts for their final year of pedagogical studies; for three quarters of that year, "candidates take the same classes together, pursue field experiences together in the two or three PDS sites assigned to each cohort, and lend each other professional and moral support" (Winitzky, Stoddart, & O'Keefe, 1992, pp. 11–12).

Each cohort at Utah has a "cohort leader," who is a tenure-track or clinical faculty member; methods faculty rotate in and out of the cohort, but the cohort leader stays with them for the whole year, taking "responsibility for helping students integrate information across methods classes, facilitating clinical assignments, supervising candidates, and helping methods faculty coordinate their courses with each other and with cooperating teachers" (Arends & Winitzky, 1996, pp. 546–47). As a result of adopting the cohort approach it has become possible to experiment with different approaches; in particular, faculty are able to explore the same concepts in both the classroom and the field and keep revisiting these concepts throughout the year (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995, pp. 5–6). According to Arends and Winitzky,

> [The cohorts] have become one of the most positively regarded aspects of the Utah program, highly rated on in-house surveys by teacher candidates and cooperating teachers alike. Candidates report that they appreciate the support system and collegiality that come from the cohort organization. (p. 547)

At Portland State University teacher education has evolved "from a four-year undergraduate program to a fifth-year, graduate teacher preparation

program that features thematic cohorts of students" (Peterson, Benson, Driscoll, Narode, Sherman, & Tama, 1995, p. 29). The cohorts are made up of 15 to 30 students who are together for the year-long program.

> [The student teachers] take classes together, are grouped in field placements, experience retreats and team building activities, share a faculty team, and engage in reflection about their work. Each cohort has an identified faculty leader and staff of instructors and supervisors. (p. 30)

Although each cohort has a distinctive thematic focus, there is a common program framework that insures competence in "planning, curriculum, instruction, pupil assessment, classroom management, teacher reflection, and professional development" (p. 30). As a result of the cohort and faculty team structure, students have access to the same faculty throughout the year; key topics can be revisited again and again in different contexts; course theory and classroom practice are integrated; there is considerable flexibility with respect to content, methods, materials, and field placements; and closer collaboration occurs between the program and the partner schools (pp. 30–33). While there was some opposition initially to adopting the cohort approach, it is now viewed very positively by both faculty and school personnel (p. 36).

School-university partnerships. One of the most widely discussed trends in preservice education over the past two decades has been the building of school–university partnerships. This has often meant the establishment of professional development schools (PDSs), with a formal agreement between a university and school to work together in preservice and inservice teacher education, school-based research, and school renewal (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Alternatively, there have been less formal arrangements with similar features: a close working relationship, exchange of staff and ideas, and clustering of a number of student teachers in each school (Goodlad, 1994). The main purpose of having such partnerships is to ensure that student teachers see many examples of good practice during their field experiences and receive the support they need to teach in an experimental, innovative manner. This model is social constructivist in several ways. It stresses a critical inquiry approach to schooling; links theory and practice; and emphasizes caring for "the whole student teacher" in the practicum, often the most stressful aspect of the program.

Drawing on a number of recent studies, Darling-Hammond (1999) describes how preservice programs use PDSs to expose student teachers to state-of-the-art practice and a purposefully structured clinical experience, in a manner comparable to that in teaching hospitals. She reports:

> In the most highly developed sites, programs are jointly planned and taught by university-based and school-based faculty. Cohorts of beginning teachers get a richer, more coherent learning experience when they are organized in

teams to study and practice with these faculty and with one another. Senior teachers report that they deepen their knowledge by serving as mentors, adjunct faculty, co-researchers, and teacher leaders. Thus these schools can help create the rub between theory and practice that teachers need in order to learn. (p. 232)

We see here how the cohort and faculty team structure, described earlier, interacts with the school–university partnership arrangement to produce a set of conditions conducive to social constructivist preservice education.

Fosnot (1996) maintains that, to achieve a constructivist teacher education program, field experiences must take place in settings that are conducive to experimentation and in which curriculum is approached "in an integrated, learner-centered fashion with emphasis on learner investigation, reflection, and discourse" (p. 206). To realize these conditions, she and her colleagues established a small program and formed partnerships with five schools, providing intensive inservice experiences for cooperating teachers from these schools. An unusual feature of their approach was that cooperating teachers and student teachers took courses together. For example, the program began with a 3-week summer institute attended by the cohort of 30 students and 15 teachers from the partnership sites.

> This institute, Teaching and Learning I, was team-taught by education and liberal arts faculty. In this institute, participants were involved in constructivist-based learning experiences (on the adult level) in order to provide them with shared opportunities to analyze their own learning and thinking. (p. 207)

Interestingly, the learning activities experienced during the institute were drawn from several different fields—mathematics, language arts, and science or social studies—so that participants would gain a broad understanding of constructivist learning.

The participants were then asked to consider the implications of their learning for pedagogy. "On Friday afternoon of each week, the group came together as a whole—a community of discourse—to propose and discuss pedagogical principles that were an outgrowth of the reflection on participants' own learning" (p. 208). Thus, in social constructivist manner, the cooperating teachers and student teachers worked together to develop and articulate an approach to learning and teaching.

INTEGRATION, INQUIRY, AND COMMUNITY: KEY COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST TEACHER EDUCATION

In this chapter, we have given an overview of social constructivism, illustrating it with reference to our own preservice program at OISE/UT and recent

general developments in teacher education. By way of summary, we now wish to draw attention to three concepts that, in our view, are at the heart of social constructivism. These concepts will then provide a structure for a more detailed discussion in later chapters of how to build a social constructivist preservice program.

The first concept—*integration*—is central to social constructivism for several reasons. The close link in constructivism between knowledge and experience, theory and practice, demands an integrated program. Further, the holism of social constructivism—the connecting of various dimensions of life—calls for a program that advocates and models integration of the cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral, the professional and the personal. And the inclusiveness of social constructivism requires a program that integrates mutual understanding and acceptance across all its aspects.

The second concept is *inquiry*. As we have seen, social constructivists maintain that all knowledge is subject to constant reassessment and critique, nothing being taken as fixed or absolute, as beyond examination and reconstruction. In particular, knowledge is open to individual and subgroup construction and interpretation. This necessitates having a preservice program that is nonauthoritarian, with an inquiry rather than a transmission orientation. Instructors can certainly help student teachers a great deal, but there must be constant dialogue and co-learning, with extensive opportunity for the students to reflect, give input, and develop their own ideas.

The third concept—*community*—is clearly essential to *social* constructivism. As indicated earlier, however, community has many dimensions: it is not just a matter of cooperative learning. It involves emotional expression, support, sharing, and inclusion. Sometimes in education we have concentrated largely on the sharing of *ideas*, on collaborative *learning*, on the *learning* community. But in our view, mutual support and other personal and emotional dimensions of community are also crucial for constructivist education. A preservice program that focuses exclusively on cognitive learning, whether carried out cooperatively or not, will not be very successful from a constructivist point of view. Students need strong support and a range of types of experiences as a basis for taking risks, developing innovative pedagogy, and giving personal meaning to what they are learning about teaching.

Our basic recommendation for preservice education, then, is to build a program that is integrated, inquiry-oriented, and community-based, these concepts being understood in social constructivist terms. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively, we will discuss in detail the nature of these qualities and how to achieve them in a preservice program. We will do so largely by giving examples from a set of preservice programs we have studied in North America and Australia, as noted in the introduction. In chapter 5, we will argue that these three qualities are inseparable from an inclusive, equity-oriented approach, and we will illustrate how to build an inclusive preservice program by refer-

ring once again to actual programs, including those described in earlier chapters. In chapter 6, we will consider how to gain support for a social constructivist approach beyond one's own preservice program, in part to enable the survival and flourishing of one's program. In the final chapter we will discuss how to conduct ongoing self-study research on a preservice program, with a view to continual improvement of the program and modeling an inquiry approach for student teachers.