

Teacher intuition and teacher development: An EFL teacher's autoethnography

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By telling autoethnographic stories, the author reflects upon her 16 years of EFL teaching and four years of MSc TESOL and PhD Education studies. Teacher intuition has played an important role in guiding her to make pedagogical decisions and judgments. Several teaching activities and designs are presented to demonstrate how the author followed her intuition and achieved 'successes' in her professional development. From unconsciously drawing on teacher intuition to consciously using the term to empower peer teachers; from making attempts to theorise her teaching practice to realising the superficiality of the complication, the author experienced transformative changes in her perceptions of teacher intuition. She came to realise that teacher intuition draws on theoretical knowledge but goes beyond it. Considering the potential value and unrecognised status of teacher intuition in language teacher education, it is advocated that teacher intuition be incorporated into teacher education as a contributing factor to teacher development.

Introduction

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*
(T. S. Eliot, 1942, p. 27)

About six years ago (in early 2018), the term *teacher intuition* first dawned on me while I was doing an assignment for a course I took in my MSc TESOL program. We were asked to deliver a group presentation with any topic related to the course, *Language Teacher Education*. As a student who had the most experience of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in my group, I was assigned to pick a topic for our group's presentation. For no specific reason, 'teacher intuition' sprang to my mind and I knew I had a lot to talk about it. When I shared my initial thought with group members, they unanimously accepted this idea. In the preparation for the presentation, I searched for 'teacher intuition' in *Google Scholar* only to find less than five articles, marginally relevant. Needless to say, my attempt to find a definition of this term failed. Therefore, in the presentation I boldly presented a provisional definition based on my vague perception of it: 'Teacher intuition is a teacher's instinctive thought, usually constructive to teaching and closely related to the teacher's personal knowledge.' This 15-minute presentation effected some change in the audience's attitudes towards teacher intuition, as was recorded in my reflective journal, required by the teacher of this course:

We conducted a survey with the audience by asking them to draw a tick or a cross to show whether they believe in *teacher intuition* before and after the presentation. The result

shows that 20% of the listeners' attitudes towards teacher intuition changed from negative to positive, which to a great extent boosts my confidence as a teacher educator and demonstrates that teachers' personal experience is a valuable asset for teacher development.

As this journal entry revealed, I did not give teacher intuition much credit in relation to teacher development; rather, I used a general and inappropriate substitute 'personal experience' to claim the credit for it because I knew teacher intuition was not a legitimate term for teacher development or education then. Surprisingly, some course mates told me after the presentation that teacher intuition was an 'empowering' concept which they had never thought of but might give more attention to in their future teaching. The response from the audience (most of them were pre-service EFL teachers; some had EFL teaching experience) left me thinking: why almost nobody studies this topic? Just because it is unpredictable, then it is unreliable? If nobody explores it, does it mean it is valueless? I had more questions like these, but as a complete novice in academia, I soon stifled the spark of curiosity, together with my voice as an EFL teacher with 16 years of teaching experience.

After taking the Masters degree in TESOL, I commenced my PhD in the same UK university with the research topic—L2 extensive reading and its implementation in secondary schools. Occasionally, 'teacher intuition' occurred to me like an amiable friend, but each time it presented itself on my mind, I dismissed it as subjective and biased, therefore unscientific and negligible. Three years passed in a flash. When I prepared for a conference presentation this year, 'teacher intuition' dawned on me again, very clear, firm, and weighty. I hesitated no more and seized it this time. The conference, with the theme of 'Frontiers of Education and Activism', was held by a prestigious university inviting PhD attendees from different parts of the UK. My presentation was entitled 'From an EFL teacher to a PhD student: An autoethnographic exploration of teacher development' in which I used *teacher intuition* as an unrecognised contributor to teacher development. The audience evinced strong interest in this topic and raised some questions which indicated that they did not perceive this term as trivial or ephemeral; rather, they provided some constructive suggestions to solidify it as a concept.

For various reasons, I did not give it further attention until recently I surprisingly found that 'teacher intuition' is not an uncharted research territory anymore: Sipman and his colleagues have completed a project concerning this topic and published a series of articles addressing it (see Sipman et al., 2019; Sipman et al., 2021; Sipman et al., 2022). The advancement of research into teacher intuition pushed me to make my contribution to the study of it by sharing my teaching and research stories. Therefore, after three years' dormancy, this paper came into being.

Rationale for the adopted methodology

I learned about autoethnography as a methodology when I read Canagarajah's (2012) article concerning teacher development with an emphasis on local pedagogical traditions and legitimacy of peripheral teacher identities. This article is a typical example of

transformative research for me, examining our own beliefs and ideologies shaped by contextual values and global norms, creatively conceptualising professionalism, and critically adapting pedagogical theories to local situations (Taylor et al., 2012). After thoroughly reading this article, I saved it in a folder named ‘empowering articles’, but until today, this is the only article in that folder. The impact of this article on me was reified into concrete questions I came up with, for example: how could one person’s life story be more powerful and influential than those data-packed and therefore ‘rigorous’ articles (at least for me)? To answer this question, I did some research on autoethnography as a methodology and found what follows.

Autoethnography is recounting one’s own stories located in and engaging with wider sociocultural contexts, with the potential of transformative and emancipatory effects on the individual (Jones et al., 2015; Starr, 2010). This narrative approach draws on insider knowledge (Jones et al., 2013) and ‘rich repository of experiences and perceptions’ (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 260) which lead to a deep inquiry conducted in a creative manner and presented in an artistic mode (Custer, 2014); thus, autoethnography accommodates ‘subjectivity, emotionality and researcher influence’ (Le Roux, 2017, p. 198). Sceptics of autoethnography, specifically *evocative autoethnography* (as opposed to *analytic autoethnography*), regard it as narcissistic and self-indulgent (Holt, 2003). Whereas, evocative autoethnographers argue that if stories were constructed with analytic characteristics, then they would lose the nature of story and bear no difference from the language of generalisation and analysis (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Personally, I perceive autoethnography as a continuum, with *evocative* and *analytic* as two extremities (Le Roux, 2017), which is aligned with the notion of *blended autoethnography* (e.g., Hains-Wesson, 2022). Regarding strategies for enhancing the credibility of autoethnography, I am more inclined towards the evocative extremity, recognising the power and value of evoking emotional resonance (Anderson, 2006). Therefore, I will tell my stories in a way to ‘evoke in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible’ (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). Meanwhile, the analytic elements of autoethnography in this article are embodied in the discussion and engagement with relevant literature presented after the accounts of my stories.

Intuition and the creative mind

I have an undergraduate degree in English rather than English education, which means I had no formal education about EFL teaching before seeking a job in this field. I started thinking of becoming an English teacher when I took a part-time job in my senior year of college as a teaching assistant in an extra-curricular tutoring class. In the process of preparing lessons, I came to realise that teaching was interesting and more importantly *creative*: I could do things in my way according to my judgment of what interested students. Mainly for this reason, I made the decision to become an EFL teacher.

In the trial lesson which determined whether I could be recruited for a post in a key middle school in Beijing, I was required to deliver a lesson entitled ‘Dream’ with the material from a textbook that I had never used. Without any teacher training/education, I

just followed my intuition to complete the lesson plan. Since this happened 20 years ago, I only remember I played the song 'Big Big World' by Emilia Rydberg as the warm-up activity and asking students to make an impromptu speech titled 'My dream' as the final activity. The very first lesson I delivered turned out to be a success: one student finished her speech with 'I want to become a passionate teacher like you!' while looking at me (ironically, I was not a teacher yet then). The next day, I was informed to have got the job.

During the first winter holiday of my teaching, I had an opportunity for teacher training about *tasked-based language teaching* (TBLT) delivered by an 'expert' from America. That was a paid training opportunity, so our school selected only one teacher to attend it who would transmit the knowledge to other teachers after the training. I was lucky to become that one teacher (or maybe leaders knew I had little training background, so I needed it most badly). For whatever reasons, I cherished the training as a chance to catch up with other teachers. Soon after the training, the head of English department asked me: 'Why not participate in a competition of lesson design, since you've learnt the cutting-edge pedagogy?' I could find no reason to reject the proposal, so responded: 'Why not?' With the only pedagogical approach TBLT (that I could name) and some guidance from senior teachers, I took part in the competition. To my great surprise, I got the first prize! The essence of the design was using attributive clauses to introduce Chinese culture. To effectively introduce people, things, places, festivals, and idioms with Chinese cultural elements, students learned and used different types of attributive clauses in this lesson (see Figure 1). The overall design came to me out of nowhere. I do not remember details of refining the initial plan, except that I bore TBLT in mind and used it as a basis for my further thinking and designing.



Figure 1. Two slides I used in the lesson titled 'Chinese traditional culture showcase - Attributive clauses'

In the following years, small 'successes' like this accumulated and my confidence in teaching grew concurrently. The weekly training that we EFL teachers attended took two main forms: demonstration lessons conducted by peer teachers; and lectures delivered by experts. To my knowledge, most of the teachers including myself preferred demonstration lessons to theoretical guidance from experts: the former was regarded as 'vivid and practical' while the latter 'abstract and boring'. In the eighth year of my teaching, a teacher

trainer from the Training Centre of our district asked me to present a demonstration lesson for more than 100 EFL teachers. I was given the task to teach a lesson about 'Beauty' from the textbook. Among us teachers, there was a well-known saying: 'one demonstration lesson costs at least five kilos' which means the pressure of designing and delivering such a lesson makes a teacher lose at least five kilograms in weight. For me, this experience was not that gruelling, but a bit challenging. Several days passed, but I still had no idea about the lesson plan. On a morning in the weekend, when I was sweeping the floor at home, I suddenly hit on the idea: I could ask students to use what they learned from the text (language) to write me a letter (content), encouraging me to be confident about my 'beauty' (see Figure 2).

In retrospect, this final task, or the *pedagogical task* (Nunan, 2004), embodied TBLT and *content and language integrated learning* (CLIL), but at that stage of my teaching, except TBLT, I knew no pedagogical concepts. The only principle I followed was what worked for my students according to my understanding of their needs and interests. This lesson received immediate recognition from the audience. Some attendees made very positive and encouraging comments on the Training Centre website. One teacher remarked: 'What suits the students most is the best. This lesson design is impeccable!' Another teacher gave the following feedback:

This is an ingenious design. Based on the understanding of the text, the teacher enabled students to use the language in an innovative way, which propelled the lesson to the climax. We were quite excited as the audience to observe this authentic interaction between the teacher and students.



Figure 2. Two slides I used in the lesson titled 'Beauty'

During the 16 years of EFL teaching in a secondary school, sparks of inspiration like these occurred to me in various forms: a solution to a problem, a lesson plan, a way of communicating with students, etc. Most of the times when it paid its visit unexpectedly, I embraced it and let it guide my thinking and teaching practice. I never related the short-lived inspiration to *teacher intuition* until this concept completed its formation or transformation three years ago as introduced at the beginning of this article.

Although there are no well-accepted definitions, some features of intuition are commonly recognised, such as being *alogical* (i.e., not following the regular rules of logic), *rapid*, and *spontaneous* (Cairns-Lee, 2020). Bergson (1946) in his seminal book *The creative mind: An introduction to metaphysics* depicted intuition in such a manner:

It grasps a succession which is not juxtaposition, a growth from within, the uninterrupted prolongation of the past into a present which is already blending into the future... Intuition, then, signifies first of all consciousness, but immediate consciousness, a vision which is scarcely distinguishable from the object seen, a knowledge which is contact and even coincidence... It may be that intuition opens the way for us into consciousness in general. (p. 20)

This depiction highlights the seemingly contradictory features of intuition: unpredictability and continuity. Intuition is unpredictable in that when it occurs to us, it is often perceived as 'coincidence'. However, intuition is embedded in our mind, growing 'from within' and extending to our consciousness. Its growth never ceases, linking the past, present, and future state and condition of our cognitive, affective, and psychological beings. What we sense as an instantaneous process of consciousness manifests the ephemerality and spontaneity of intuition, which in nature is reflective of the fluidity and cohesiveness of cognition, emotion, and judgment. Intuition 'uses ideas as a conveyance' and eventually lodges in concepts (Bergson, 1946, p. 29). In the transformation from the simplicity of intuition to the accessibility of ideas, *complication* is inevitable. In essence, this 'complication' is superficial, and the construction of ideas and concepts out of intuition is 'a mere accessory' (Bergson, 1946, p. 104). A metaphor about intuition offers a simplified if not oversimplified version of Bergson's elucidation: intuition is 'a crystal inside a jungle' (Cairns-Lee, 2020, p. 288). The importance of the complication, although intrinsically auxiliary or even unnecessary, lies in the fact that without it, the unexpected and easy attainment of intuition makes it almost negligible. As Polányi (1962) put it: 'I have had my solutions for a long time but I do not yet know how I am to arrive at them.' (p. 131)

Applying intuition to education, Van Manen (1995) used the term *pedagogical tact* to connote the 'improvisational pedagogical-didactical skill of instantly knowing' (p. 41). To be specific, what guides teachers' actions is not 'reasoned thought', but a type of knowledge that 'cannot always be translated back into propositional statements or cognitive theories' (p. 45). Corroborating Bergson's (1946) notion of superficial and accessory complication involved in the construction of linkage between intuition and theories, Van Manen (1995) posited that it may even be impossible to build this linkage. In this sense, intuition is not readily compatible with interpretation and conceptualisation; rather, it is inspirational and edifying in its own right. Prabhu (1990) coined the term *sense of plausibility* to refer to teachers' pedagogical intuition. When teachers actively engage with their sense of plausibility, teaching is more likely to be productive in lieu of mechanical, and the productivity may probably enhance teacher satisfaction which in turn strengthens their sense of plausibility. Similarly, Hargreaves (1994) used the term *sense of practicality* or *ethic of practicality* to denote teachers' judgment about what works and what doesn't in their teaching, as a result of the 'distillation of complex and potent combinations of purpose, person, politics and workplace constraints' (p. 12). More directly and plainly, *intuitive*

knowledge is used by Noddings and Shore (1984) to allude to the guidance provided by intuition which ‘contacts objects directly in phenomena’ (p. 57).

My personal experience consolidates the proposition that intuition is spontaneous but reliable as well. I did not know when an ingenious teaching plan would occur to me, but I knew it would come sooner or later. Rather than passively waiting for it, I chose to be watchful for it while doing other things. In effect, it never failed to come. I was somewhat lucky in that I did not need to rationalise lesson designs by providing theoretical frameworks or pedagogical approaches; otherwise, I would have agonised about how to complicate those teaching plans that so naturally came to me. Sometimes, I was jokingly called a ‘born teacher’ by colleagues because they thought I never seemed to be short of good ideas. I would argue, though, maybe I was just more sensitive or confident to grasp the instantaneous occurrence of intuition. Whether or not this is the case, recent studies have found that practices for enhancing the awareness of teacher intuition could exert positive effects on teachers’ pedagogical tact (Sipman et al., 2022). This is a promising finding because, even if there is an unbalanced distribution of intuition among teachers, relative training may remedy this difference.

Practice and theorisation

After teaching EFL for 16 years in a middle school in Beijing, I quit my job and went to the UK for an MSc TESOL program. A major reason for making this decision was that I had some experiences of mentoring young teachers and enjoyed being helpful and inspirational for other language teachers. I could sense my aspirations to become a teacher trainer or educator, and this one-year program might serve as a step towards this goal. I remember the first academic paper we read in a major course of this program was Kumaravadivelu’s (2006) state-of-the-art article: *TESOL methods: Changing tracks, challenging trends*. This article was empowering for me because for the first time in my life I learnt about postmethod pedagogy which legitimises classroom teachers’ own theory out of their teaching practice. Compared with methods, or ‘rigidly prescribed body of conventionalized instructional procedures’ (Scholl, 2017, p. 96), teacher judgment in many cases is more salient because it draws on ‘the multiplicity of learner identities’ and ‘the complexity of teacher beliefs’, both of which are located in and shaped by certain sociocultural, political, and historical contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 75).

Heavily influenced by postmethod pedagogy, I began to theorise my previous teaching practices. For my MSc dissertation (Sun, 2020), I conducted a retrospective case study reporting the two-year reading project my colleagues and I carried out as aforementioned. First of all, I read extensively for theoretical frameworks that could accommodate what I had done. Eventually, I decided to identify our reading project as an ‘extensive reading’ program because students read a lot and their focus was on *content* rather than *language*. Meanwhile, I was cognisant that what we did in the reading program did not strictly adhere to the ten principles of extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 1998). For example, in our project, reading materials were not always selected by students and the texts were not easy enough for some students to read at a fast speed, therefore violating at least two

fundamental principles of extensive reading. It was at this moment that postmethod pedagogy came to my rescue: I should be able to theorise it as an extensive reading program, or a type of extensive reading with exam-oriented characteristics. In so thinking, I completed my dissertation smoothly and confidently, and my dissertation (Sun, 2020) earned a Distinction. This result rendered me even more trustful of postmethod pedagogy and its empowering effect on teachers.

To share what I had done in a wider community, I decided to publish my dissertation. However, the Distinction-awarded dissertation did not bring me more 'glory', but some ignominious failures. The first journal I submitted my revised dissertation to was an influential one in this field. When I read the reviewer's feedback, I was dumbfounded:

The most widely accepted characteristics of principles of extensive reading is that the students select their own books to read— self-selection. This was not done in the first stage... The author must revise the discussion of the first stage... Because the study involved class readers in stage one (not extensive reading), the title of the manuscript must be changed.

As noted earlier, for a while I had doubted the legitimacy of the reading project as an extensive reading program because as the reviewer pointed out: reading materials were not selected by students in the first stage. However, we did so for some valid reasons: first, most students had no previous experience of reading original English novels, so they needed teacher guidance and instruction. In this sense, using a class reader (a book selected by the teacher for the whole class to read) facilitated teacher scaffolding and supervision. Second, in an exam-oriented teaching environment like ours, 'reading is its own reward' (Day & Bamford, 1998, p. 8) was an impractical notion when extensive reading was carried out as a pedagogical activity. After some reasoning and arguing with myself, I plucked up courage and resubmitted the manuscript to another journal. Misfortune never comes alone. Again, the submission was rejected with a comment which was quite similar to the previous one:

The implementation described here does not constitute extensive reading as the description of the reading programme... with many guided activities and teacher-assigned homework for the students to complete outside of the classroom. Clearly, this is rather unlike an extensive reading programme.

The second rejection almost defeated me and I began to doubt myself not only about my academic competence, but also about my EFL teaching. Did my dissertation really deserve a Distinction if I made such a conceptual mistake? Did I do something conceptually wrong in my previous teaching? Such questions made me feel disheartened and strangled. I could do nothing but turn to my supervisor (who was an 'expert' in extensive reading) for guidance and direction. She shared with me one of her frustrating stories concerning publication to get across a message: diversity is characteristic of academia—some are broad-minded while some are comparatively dogmatic in accepting novel ideas. Supervisor's consolation helped me regain some confidence. Then, I submitted my dissertation (Sun, 2020) for a third time. She was right: this time it was accepted by a peer-reviewed journal almost without any revision!

This experience made me re-examine postmethod pedagogy which encourages teachers to ‘theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize’ (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 69). Some scholars regard postmethod pedagogy as ‘liberating’ (Ahsanu, 2021) and ‘deconstructive’ (Kamali, 2021), which empowers teachers to free themselves from the constraint of using Methods in justification of their teaching. Meanwhile, postmethod pedagogy is criticised as ‘demanding’ (Amiri & Sahragard, 2018) for teachers to fulfil multiple roles such as theoriser, innovator, and planner (Islam & Shuchi, 2017), therefore ‘idealistic’ (Fathi & Nezakatgoo, 2017) or practically problematic if not impossible (Akbari, 2008). My perceptions of postmethod pedagogy underwent a transformation from enthusiastic espousal to slight doubt. The unsuccessful submissions acted as the trigger for the change of my attitudes towards it. To be specific, I began to question the legitimacy of teachers’ ‘theories’ even if they are able to create some out of their practices. My attempt to theorise my teaching practice through extending the denotation of a concept failed twice because the ‘experts’ did not accept such an amendment to a ‘fixed’ concept.

Teachers might be able to theorise their practice if they are aware of it, but what if the theory derived from classroom practice is not acknowledged by a wider community especially those who control the dominant discourse? Without external recognition, why do teachers need to get involved into the *complication* of constructing a link between their initiative thoughts and theoretical rationales (Bergson, 1946)? Another interpretation of my failed attempts to theorise my practice was my incomplete separation from methods—I should not have used ‘extensive reading’ as a reading method to legitimise my practice. Rather, I should have come up with a completely new term/concept to demonstrate that I was not constrained by any methods. If this interpretation holds water, then another question arises: how many classroom teachers have the courage to create something totally new and claim it as a theory? Thus, my question remained unanswered: do teachers need to theorise their practice? This question led me to Wenger’s (1998) thought-provoking remarks:

The indigenous production of practice makes communities of practice the locus of creative achievements and the locus of inbred failures; the locus of resistance to oppression and the locus of the reproduction of its conditions the cradle of the self but also the potential cage of the soul. (p. 85)

My experience enabled me to interpret Wenger’s words in a unique way. Without knowing those pedagogical terminologies, I was a confident (maybe ignorant as well) teacher, enjoying what I was doing and my students’ positive and active response to my theoretically barren practices. I celebrated those ‘creative achievements’ although they were not theoretically sound. I found ‘the self’ in my teaching because I put my ‘soul’ and sensibility into it without much vigilance for rationality and reasoning. Whereas, the failed attempts to be pedagogically rational and theoretically sensible made me feel the ‘oppression’ up there, governing what I could claim and what boundaries I could not cross as a classroom teacher and a novice in academia.

My doubt about theorising teachers' own practice serves as a starting point for my further thinking and critique. If the practicality of theorisation for teachers is doubtful, then do we have other concepts or pedagogy that could legitimise teacher practices that take into consideration the specificity of teaching environments? Following such questions, I came across the term *practical wisdom* which gives emphasis and credibility to the situated, unique, and concrete teaching practice, as well as teachers' judgments and responses to the particularity of educational activities (Biesta, 2012). Biesta holds that practical wisdom is not a skill or competence, but a quality of teachers to make educationally admirable decisions. I agree with the notion that being a 'wise' teacher does not necessitate much teaching skill or competence, but 'educationally admirable decision' sounds remote and intangible to me, although I know the hidden message here could be that teachers can be the judge of their own practice. In this sense, *practical wisdom* empowers teachers to have faith in their context-situated pedagogy with the privilege that they do not need to label their actions with theoretical terms. However, teachers need the route, something more specific, tangible, and vivid to guide them towards the wisdom of making judicious teaching judgments. The question is: is there such a route?

Teacher intuition and teacher development

After taking the MSc TESOL degree, I continued with my PhD (Sun, 2021) and the quest for further education. My research topic extended the previous one, still focused on extensive reading and its implementation. This time, I investigated ten extensive reading programs conducted by ten EFL teachers of varied teaching experience in different secondary schools in China (Sun, 2022a; Sun, 2022b). Disparate from my MSc dissertation research (Sun, 2020) in which I acted as an insider, in the doctoral thesis project, I was an outsider collecting data from teaching contexts I was not part of (Sun, 2021). Rather than using the ten principles of extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 1998) to appraise these reading programs, I investigated how the teachers interpreted extensive reading and implemented it in response to the teaching requirements and student needs. In a sense, what I was doing was to challenge 'dominant assumptions by bringing new thinking, values, and practices from the outside' (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 271).

My findings indicated that teachers' basic perceptions of extensive reading were similar to what 'experts' said. For example, extensive reading was perceived by some teachers as *reading for pleasure* (Krashen, 1993; Nation & Macalister, 2020); to obtain the pleasure, students are supposed to read what they are interested in, which for some students entails selecting their own reading materials (Nation & Waring, 2019); meanwhile, large quantities of reading, or in some teachers' words, a certain amount of accumulation is prerequisite for extensive reading to take effect on language learning (Jacobs & Farrell, 2012). Although teachers' perceptions matched some commonly accepted characteristics of extensive reading, their practices did not closely adhere to their theoretical understandings. For instance, reading materials in most of the programs were (partly) selected by teachers rather than students, and various activities were organised to facilitate the reading. Ironically, the criticism I received from the two reviewers about the disqualification of my reading program as an extensive reading one was once again reflected in other teaching

contexts in China. The commonality and differences between these teachers' pedagogical activities seem to evidence that the driving force for pedagogical decisions was not theoretical correctness, but teacher judgment of what suited the contextual features and requirements of the teaching environment. Very interestingly, these teachers had little professional training about extensive reading (some had none at all); at most times, they just followed their intuition to do what they regarded as extensive reading.

Based on my understanding of teacher intuition and relevant experiences of peer teachers, I tentatively put forward a proposition that teacher intuition should be given a higher priority in teacher development and teacher education. In terms of making pedagogical decisions, teacher intuition may even take centre stage, bolstered by theoretical and methodological knowledge. As Van Manen (1977) said, it is 'phenomenological and interpretive bodies of knowledge' rather than 'empirical-analytic theory and research' that leads to teachers' sense-making (p. 220). In lieu of seeing intuition as opposed to principled or analytic reasoning, it might be more sensible to assume that intuition is essentially intertwined with rationality, or analytical/propositional thinking (Noddings & Shore, 1984), and it is the amalgam that moulds teacher judgment (Vanlommel, 2018). In line with this supposition, Hedgcock (2002) in the socioliterate model for language teacher education, highlighted intuition as important as (meta)linguistic knowledge, theory, and practice, all of which are interdependently constructed and mutually supportive.

Teacher intuition is related to teacher development in that as an offshoot of teacher education, personal knowledge is derived from teacher intuition alongside teachers' reflection and insight (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). A number of scholars endorse the view that intuition is correlated with expertise, thus use terms such as *skilled intuition* (Simon, 1992), *expert intuition* (Kahneman & Klein, 2009), and *skilled intuitive judgment* (Vanlommel, 2018) to indicate that teacher intuition grows in tandem with the development of professional skills. Some scholars even hold the view that the competence of making intuitive decisions is symbolic of 'progression from proficiency to expertise' (Eraut, 1994, p. 126). In the same vein, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) posited that *intuitive grasp of situations* is an indicator of expertise. In this sense, inexperienced teachers are downgraded in terms of making intuitive judgments due to their relative lack of teaching experience.

Personally, I do not contend teacher intuition is proportionally related to teaching experience or expertise. Rather, I assume that teachers at different stages of their careers are all capable of making intuitive judgments. In other words, teachers *feelingly know* what is appropriate for their students under specific circumstances (Van Manen, 1995, emphasis in original) irrespective of their teaching experience. It might be easier for experienced teachers to realise and acknowledge teacher intuition as a type of capability that they could draw on in their teaching practice. My emphasis therefore is, it is not lack of teacher intuition but lack of confidence in accepting it as rational that makes novice or inexperienced teachers seemingly 'weak' in this aspect. Thus, I would argue that teachers with any teaching backgrounds can beneficially be cognisant of teacher intuition and use it to their advantage when making pedagogical decisions.

Intuition is also regarded by some scholars as closely related to creativity (Valle, 2017). To demonstrate the intertwined relationship between intuition and creativity, Popper (1968) coined the term *creative intuition* as opposed to 'a logical method of having ideas' (p. 8). Rather than taking a dichotomous stance, some scholars stress the combined effect of inspirational and regulated thoughts for the formation of creativity (Coffey & Leung, 2016); or rather, creativity is derived from a repertoire of intuitive understanding and established principles. Aligned with this notion, less experienced teachers are deemed as less likely to be creative in teaching (Richards & Cotterall, 2016). As I do not regard expertise as prerequisite for intuition, I do not agree teaching experience is a precondition for pedagogical creativity, either.

My personal experiences indicate that creative intuition (I borrow Popper's term to stress the intersection between creativity and intuition) might be influenced by teaching experience, but it is more impacted by personal knowledge, teacher agency, and how much credibility is attached to intuition as a valuable teaching resource. I am sympathetic to the notion that the power of creative intuition in teaching lies in its potential of transforming what we can do with language teaching: 'a transformation in agency, resulting in increased self-efficacy and empowerment on the part of teachers and learners' (Jones & Richards, 2016, p. 7). Thus, we need to help teachers see their potential of effecting the transformation in agency which further improves self-efficacy and increases confidence in teacher intuition as a beneficial factor for their professional development

Conclusion

In retrospect, much of what I achieved as an EFL teacher can be attributed to *teacher intuition*, an 'immediate consciousness' (Bergson, 1946), vague and unstable, hitting on me like the predecessor of a good idea. This seemingly coincidental occurrence explains why teacher intuition has not been recognised as a salient component of teacher development and therefore crowded out from teacher education. This being the case, if 'complication' is involved, that is, relevant theories or concepts can be transplanted to rationalise the too easily obtained thought, then its value in feeding into 'a good idea' might be noticed. Essentially, this complication is 'superficial' (Bergson, 1946) or even impossible (Van Manen, 1995), but without it, 'a good idea' has no theoretical origin and therefore might be banished from teachers' mind.

The ground-breaking concept, postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), to a certain degree frees teachers from the constraint of adhering to theoretical conventions (or methods). Nevertheless, this concept could be parlous as well. The encouragement it offers to teachers to theorise their practice and practise their theories may adversely affect teacher efficacy as it happened to me. My unsuccessful attempts to theorise my teaching practice led to some unnecessary infliction of self-doubt about my ability to conceptualise and even to teach. I am by no means arguing that methods are useless; rather, I maintain that teachers should be receptive to theoretical knowledge and pedagogic innovations. However, it is important to note that teaching on many occasions is impromptu and creative, thus difficult or even impossible to be generalised or theorised.

For classroom teachers, it might be more practical and beneficial to accentuate teacher intuition which draws on and feeds into theoretical knowledge. To be specific, when intuition which feels like a passing whim or a spark of inspiration presents itself, it is advisable to grasp the instantaneous thought and put it into practice. If it turns out to be feasible and effective, then the teacher might be contributing wisdom to pedagogical innovations which will further enhance teacher efficacy and agency. If it does not bring about satisfactory outcomes, the teacher may take it as a reminder to consult expertise or theoretical knowledge. In the process of engaging with principled methods or conceptual frameworks, teacher intuition may incrementally develop until it is fully-fledged and hits on us. Thus, sensitivity to it is essential. The accentuation of teacher intuition and consultation of expertise or theoretical guidelines often lead to a context-sensitive pedagogy which prioritises student needs and the specificity of teaching environments. More importantly, teachers with their complete system of cognition and creation possess a central stage in pedagogical designs and innovations.

One implication of this study is that teacher intuition should be given more credibility and merit in language teacher education, since the current situation is that teachers are rarely encouraged to make conscious use of their intuition in teaching practice (Sipman et al., 2019). As a closing remark, I would like to borrow Biesta's (2013) book title - *Beautiful risk of education*. When we are respectful of teacher intuition, there is a bigger chance for us to see the beauty of uncertainty in teaching.

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Please cite as: Sun, X. (2024). Teacher intuition and teacher development: An EFL teacher's autoethnography. *Issues in Educational Research*, 34(2), 743-759. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier34/sun.pdf>