

Introduction: Self-Study and Living Educational Theory

By Stefinee Pinnegar & Tom Russell

The theme of this issue is “Becoming a Professor of Teacher Education.” There are many accounts of first-year teachers, but there are very few accounts of first-year professors of teacher education. The first four papers are by four people who completed their doctoral studies in teacher education at the University of Arizona at the same time. As they left their shared world in Tucson to take up their first

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academic appointments, Karen Guilfoyle, Mary Lynn Hamilton, Margaret Placier, and Stefinee Pinnegar made a commitment to share their personal journals in which they would detail the “trials and tribulations” as well as the rewards of their early years as assistant professors. It was Tom Russell's good fortune to meet them in Arizona and to be trusted by them to share in some of their stories. His paper offers an account of his efforts to renew himself as a professor of education by returning to the classroom, taking his student teachers in physics with him.

The dialogic responses by Jack Whitehead after each paper and the retrospective overview by Fred Korthagen in the sixth paper share the commitment in the first five papers to documenting the creation of

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living educational theory through the power of self-study. Each paper documents an experience of being a “living contradiction” within the practice setting and captures the experience, our responses, and the ways in which we have moved our own educational practices forward. Each paper presents an educational research endeavor in which the systematic inquiry is made public.

As both the subject and the researcher of an inquiry, each author provides simultaneously the experience of volatile research settings and the analysis of the experience in ways that may allow others to understand and use the findings in their own practice. For us, this is the heart and the promise of self-study. This is “high risk” research because it reveals us as researchers, as educators, and most importantly, as human beings. As Placier says of her study of her grading practices, she was “embarrassed by the ad hoc, individualistic quality of my development as a college teacher documented here.” Yet each of us is willing to document our struggles, our embarrassment, our responses to problems, our failures, and sometimes our successes, because this documentation and accompanying analysis provide a new way of understanding not only how we come to be teacher educators, but also how our own students learn to be teachers. Furthermore, it allows readers, who are (re)experiencing these events with us, to take away insights for their own work as teacher educators.

We feel the work in this special issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* is important to research in teacher education for three reasons in particular:

1. There is little research on teacher education as an enterprise.
2. These papers present examples of self-study and therefore demonstrate research methodology for practical inquiry (Richardson, 1994).
3. Each study investigates a question of practice from teacher education that is individually important and also of broader interest to the teacher education community.

Teacher education is a unique place to study teaching because in many ways it most visibly represents **the essential test of teaching**, one which involves three people: the teacher, the student becoming a teacher, and the student-teacher’s students. As a teacher educator, it is not enough to model good teaching practice for students and to be concerned about the learning of our students-becoming-teachers. We also bear responsibility for the teaching practices of our students who become teachers and must be concerned about the learning experiences of their students. We have found little in teacher education research that examines teacher education from this perspective. Guilfoyle expresses it well when she says:

In addition, demonstrations by teacher educators allow preservice students to observe that teaching is a life-long learning process, that one doesn’t eventually become a teacher; but instead moves in understanding teaching/learning through active involvement in the process.

Impressionism as a movement in painting began because of a change not so much in methodology, but because of advances in painting materials, which meant that painters could suddenly, for the first time, paint outdoors rather than in a studio. Artists became enthralled with “exactly” capturing the light, the scene, as it appeared to them while they painted within it. We feel there are important elements in common between our experience and that of the Impressionists. We have become interested in capturing our experiences and our teaching endeavours, trying to see how we enact our practice and the conflicts that arise (both in ourselves and in our students) as close as possible to the moment they occur, and then analyzing the data produced to determine what can be discovered about teaching and learning in such experiences. We feel that, while the research methodologies we use are not new, we are developing new ways to use them. Like the Impressionists, we are following the “light” and, as a result, learning to better understand teaching and teacher education. As Hamilton says: “Passion—the desire to know more, to seek out ideas, to reveal a self—became a relevant part of intellectual pursuits.”

Guilfoyle and Hamilton’s contributions together represent a new field of research in the socialization of the teacher educator. These two papers are connected to a larger body of work conducted by Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, and Placier, who together are studying their own socialization as teacher education professors. Individually, Guilfoyle and Hamilton’s papers develop insight into important aspects of teacher educators’ socialization. Guilfoyle examines how beginning teacher educators experience the conflict of resolving the practices of teacher and researcher, both of which are important responsibilities of the teacher educator. She responds to the living contradiction of trying to be simultaneously a teacher educator **and** a researcher:

Understanding that my history influences this research and that the findings are my interpretations, I weave my history, belief, and personal reflections throughout the discussion. My data represent choices I made and I present the data to illustrate my choices. I have adequate data to give credibility to my analysis. I support my findings with other voices, research, and interpretations. In sharing my interpretations, I join the conversation.

Hamilton investigates how an innovative teacher educator, committed to reform in teacher education and teaching experiences, develops her voice and the power to enact change within the conservative cultures of universities, colleges of education, and schools. By developing her voice in the university setting, she shows how an assistant professor in teacher education resolves feeling simultaneously an “insider” and an “outsider” in that culture. She characterizes the complexity of the resolution when she says:

What people do not say, are not allowed to say, are unable to say, is crucial to understanding their voice. What is not said is as important as what is said. The silences, in fact, represent the existing power struggles. And language sets con-

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ditions by which events are interpreted and the self is located in an ever-changing world.

The papers by Placier, Pinnegar, and Russell are collectively interesting because they provide new understanding of the experiences of teaching from within teacher education. They document experience with the practices of a teacher educator that are centered in teaching. Other teacher educators have documented their experiences of teaching in public classrooms; the papers by Pinnegar and Russell move beyond this work by focusing on what they learned from their experiences that relates directly to teacher education practice. In Pinnegar's work, the focus is the experience of "beginning," whether as professor or as student teacher; in Russell's paper, the focus is the practice of evaluating teaching in student teaching, in guiding the development of teachers, and in research on teaching.

The Placier paper is unique because it focuses on teaching in a university teacher education classroom, documenting the struggle of meshing policy, politics, practice, and values in an undertaking that all educators in public institutions generally share—the assigning of grades. Placier studies the politics of grading. What do grades mean, to both students and faculty? What happens when a teacher educator attempts to live her own democratic values in a teacher education classroom in a university? She documents the experience of trying to be democratic in her practice in a setting where institutional constraints, student expectations, and her own past experiences force her into an autocratic role: "I have often questioned why my most intense discussions with students, in and out of class, concern grades rather than course content."

Pinnegar explores the experience of "beginning" as a teacher by revisiting many of the significant professional beginnings in her life, from new teacher to new doctoral student to new assistant professor, first in one setting and then, three years later, in another.

In contemplating this analysis, I find myself vulnerable, apprehensive, yet hopeful, unsure of what is salient and unsure of meaning: I am a beginner both in this institution and in attempting to use methodology in this way. For this investigation, what I have constantly struggled with is making sense of what it is like to begin as a teacher or teacher educator, and at the same time I have been intensely experiencing the repercussions of being a beginner. I have spent the year not just beginning, but struggling with how to represent that beginning. As the quote that opens this paper suggests, I have been trying to "feel" and "see" what this experience is like at the same time that I have been "feeling" and "seeing" as a result of being a beginner. When I say, "We (beginners) feel more than we know," I am the one feeling and unsure of what I know.

Russell studies the experience of returning to teach physics in a high school classroom and of being evaluated as a developing teacher. Finding himself in this dual role—one who evaluates and who himself is evaluated—he experienced a living contradiction:

One of the many powerful contrasts I experienced came in the context of being observed by different people with different backgrounds and roles. The visits by student teachers [from my own class at Queen's] did lead to interesting discussions, but only once did I receive extensive comments about my teaching. On that occasion, a student teacher with a strong personal commitment to inquiry and discovery came into my office after watching one of my classes and proceeded to tell me very directly that "students are different from the last time you taught" and suggested that I needed more diversity and activity in my lessons. More than anything else, I realized that here was a student talking about my teaching in exactly the same way that I or my colleagues (or any supervisor of teaching) might speak to a student teacher about a single lesson that had just been observed.

In addition, we feel the critiques and analyses of these studies by Korthagen and Whitehead provide further and provocative insight into how teacher education might be studied and how such work can move forward both **the study of teacher education** and **the practices of the teacher educator**. The issue as a whole expresses the documentation of living educational theory (Whitehead, 1993). Over the past five years, the seven of us have worked collectively to research our own practices and to examine what a living educational theory might be. Two of our most pressing concerns can be summarized as questions we continue to ask of each other:

1. What would a reconstruction of the experience and the knowledge we gained look like as a research study?
2. What would count as evidence, knowing, validity, analysis, and representation in a documentation of living educational theory?

Each of these papers illustrates approaches to this endeavor and will, we believe, move forward the enterprise of self-study in teacher education practices, specifically, and research in education, generally. We believe there are few issues more central to those living the contradictions associated with becoming a professor of teacher education.

References

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