

## **Modifying Conditions of Researching in Teacher Education Institutions**

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Publish or perish. The photographic image (see page 9) is of an installation which was one part of a three-part multi-media representation of data gathered in a large scale funded study of the lives and work of pretenured teacher educators.<sup>1</sup> The title of the installation, "A Perfect Imbalance," vividly captures one of the central paradoxes inherent in teacher educators' work—a balancing act of activities, demands, obligations, commitments, and aspirations. The multiplistic and diverse nature of teacher educators' work and the time and energy commitments involved in the elusive pursuit of a balanced professional life also makes a search for balance between the personal and professional realms of life a fruitless effort.

The dual mandate of teacher educators' work that requires them (indeed, us) to serve both the academy

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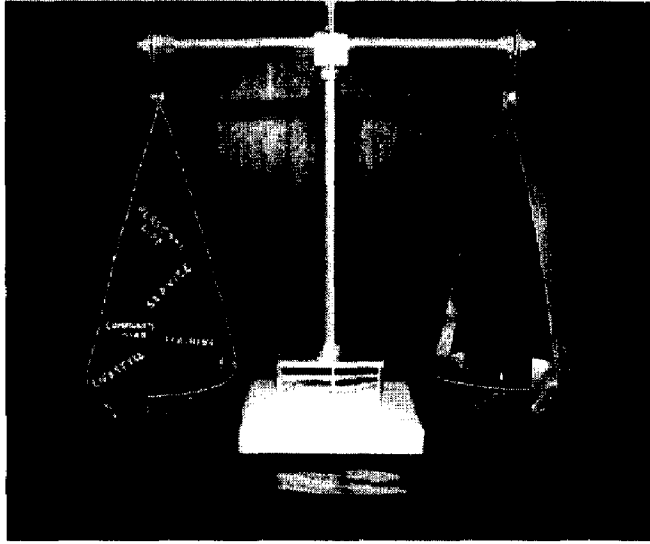
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and the profession of teaching keeps their gaze focused on the fulcrum of their lives, always striving for balance, the perfect balance. Work and personal (self and family) commitments pull against one another. Time spent on teaching and field development activities must be kept in check so that sufficient time is available for research and writing, key emphases in the milieu of postmodern universities. Decisions about the kind of research in which to engage, where to publish, and for what purposes must take into account the different sets of values that separately define the teaching profession and the academy. Aspirations and commitments to collaborative work must be carefully monitored (even in spite of rhetoric that suggests otherwise) so as to live up to the university's standards of individualism and independence, especially for purposes of tenure, promotion, and salary increases based on a merit system. A divergence in research interests must be curtailed in order to establish a specialized and unique program of research. Attitudes, values, and practices cannot be overly challenging of the status quo upon which all structures, policies, and norms are based.

But the problem for most teacher educators, especially those committed to change in teacher education, is that no matter how hard they try the scales are impossible to balance because the respective weights of academic and professional endeavors are uneven at the outset. According to the values and standards of the university, teaching, service, professional and community development, and other activities that have mainly local or personal implications and which demand inordinate time and energy commitments, do not carry much weight. (These are the activities best suited to the mundane, activities not appropriate to those engaged within the lofty heights of the ivory tower.) The heavy weights from the university's perspective are those activities which result in intellectual and financial prestige and international acclaim. For most teacher educators, it seems, any balance that *is* possible to achieve is always imperfect. Such imperfections come from being mired in the swamps of practice, so teacher educators are implicitly led to believe.

Our emotions run high when we listen to teacher educators speak about the place of research and scholarship in their lives. Their powerful stories of experience evidence the fact that the researching enterprises of so many teacher educators come at considerable costs: time for scholarship is squeezed out from between the cracks of professional and familial time. Personal time is lost to the multiplicity of demands and the inane pressures to publish.

Time is the one commodity for which most teacher educators crave more. Time, assuming the presence of intellectual and physical energies that both complement it and are needed for innovative, embryonic work to develop, is the fundamental component which makes possible the development of conceptually sound and professionally meaningful scholarly inquiries. Moreover, for teacher educators, these researching endeavors are almost always set amid professional contexts which present competing demands. Practice. Theory. Pedagogy. Inquiry. Students. Institution. Community. Individuals. This competition is especially so for



"A Perfect Imbalance"

Multi-media installation

by Ardra L. Cole, J. Gary Knowles, Brenda Brown, and Margie Buttignol

early career teacher education professors or those in the early phases of post-doctoral studies.

Time for research often comes at great costs; teaching and supervising agenda, not to mention bureaucratic directives in the form of meetings and paperwork, simply drain many teacher educators of their energies for activities associated with research and scholarship. On the one hand, such "community" activities are essential for the development of sound programs of instruction and the articulation of appropriate pedagogies. Their absence in teacher education can only reflect poorly on the state of programmatic development. On the other hand, it is these very same activities (which become demands) and their institutionalization within bureaucratic structures which can deplete the energies for creative inquiry and its resulting scholarship. The line is fine indeed.

Teacher education scholars are in a unique position because so much of their work is situated in professional practice located exterior to the protected sanctuaries and ivory towers of the "pure disciplines" of the arts and sciences, the standard bearers of scholarly expectations within the world of western universities as they have come to be. The problem of lack of time for scholarship is emphasized even more in those national, regional, or local contexts where teacher educators, as

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scholars and teachers, are simultaneously working on doctoral theses or dissertations and trying to meet the university expectations to publish.

In Australia, for instance, more junior appointments to the professoriate (generally defined as "academic staff") are often made without the completion of a terminal degree. For those individuals the pressures are potentially great. The pressures are even greater when considered alongside the ways academic departments often arrange and allocate teaching, field supervision, and field and institutional development roles and responsibilities. The most junior academics often labor under loads and pressures that more experienced and senior faculty would simply reject.

In North America, particularly the United States, teaching assistants, who are preparing for careers as teacher education professors, also are often found taking on extensive roles within teacher education courses and programs. While, generally speaking, these kinds of responsibilities and roles can constructively contribute to the early career development, standing, and credibility of new doctoral graduates, they do, nevertheless, establish unreasonable expectations for the professoriate and for individuals' continued existence within it.

In the professional lives of teachers of teachers, generally speaking, expectations and activities associated with research and scholarship and those related to other professional demands—teaching, service, professional and community development, school-based work, reform efforts—pull against one another, creating dilemmas for teacher educators that are seemingly unresolvable.

The achievement of personal-professional goals is becoming increasingly difficult within the current climate of economic rationalism where: teacher educators (and others) are required to do more with less (fiscally, programmatically, professionally); emphasis on quantity (especially for purposes of evaluation) makes quality difficult (more coursework, more students, more publications, more grants); increasing outside interference by government and other legislative and policymaking bodies restrict academic and programmatic freedoms; demands on academic staff are reaching unachievable limits and stress, burnout, and disillusionment are pervasive.

These kinds of pressures evoke more conservative practices which set up contradictions and tensions with respect to both the articulation and implementation of teacher education and development programs and academic activities. They force certain kinds of decisions about pedagogy and program and about personal activity and academic productivity. The fiscally-driven pressures evoke more conservative practices with respect to the professional development and other activities of faculty and academic staff, their use of time, and an overriding emphasis on measured and targeted productivity. Perish by publishing.

We, as teacher educators enmeshed in the publish or perish phenomenon, need to pause and reflect on the state of academic life which drives teacher education programs—the existing assumptions underlying the work of teacher educators and how such assumptions and their concomitant practices might be changed. It is time to pause and reflect with an eye to future action. To initiate such a pause and to

provoke discussion of these issues we offer the following outline. We lay out a set of assumptions upon which some elements of traditional university-based teacher educators' work are based. For each assumption we offer an alternative one that could be considered foundational for a reorientation of teacher educators' work and, finally, we articulate a vision of what such a reorientation might mean in practice.

### **Toward a Re-orientation of Teacher Educators' Work**

◆ *Conventional Assumption:* Research is more highly valued than any other activity.  
*Alternative Assumption:* Especially within teacher education, academic activities (including research) associated with teaching are highly valued.  
*Meaning in Practice:* A broadened definition of research and scholarship would include "self-study" of teacher education practices and the contexts and processes of everyday teacher education work would become possibilities for inquiry.

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◆ *Conventional Assumption:* Research productivity is the best indicator of faculty worth.  
*Alternative Assumption:* Faculty contribution is optimum when individually determined and negotiated.  
*Meaning in Practice:* Individual freedom to choose the nature and direction of work without fear of reprisal is as important as redefining what counts as research.

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◆ *Conventional Assumption:* Quantity matters more than quality.  
*Alternative Assumption:* Numerical assessments are poor indicators of work quality (let alone scholarship).  
*Meaning in Practice:* Systematic efforts to challenge the over-reliance on measured accountability and productivity are imperative; quality would be emphasized over quantity.

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◆ *Conventional Assumption:* Status quo practices and approaches to scholarship are preferable.  
*Alternative Assumption:* Non-conventional approaches to research and challenges to status quo concepts go further in advancing "knowledge."  
*Meaning in Practice:* Collective efforts are required to promote and conduct alternative paradigm research; being on the margins fosters views alternative to the status quo.

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◆ *Conventional Assumption:* The purpose of research is to develop scientific knowledge and abstracted theories.  
*Alternative Assumption:* The purpose of research is also to inform practice; in

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teacher education theory and practice merge.

*Meaning in Practice:* Collective efforts to promote and conduct research are rooted in and aimed at informing personal/professional practice.

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◆ *Conventional Assumption:* Research and publishing in exclusively scholarly venues have an impact on knowledge development and society.

*Alternative Assumption:* Wider accessibility of research findings to the public has a better chance of impact.

*Meaning in Practice:* Greater emphasis is placed on diversity in communication forms and venues; opportunities to create alternative research "texts".

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◆ *Conventional Assumption:* Research and teaching are dichotomous activities.

*Alternative Assumption:* Within the field of teaching and teacher education, research and teaching are inter-related and mutually informing.

*Meaning in Practice:* Teaching and other elements of practice are considered as "sites" of research.

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◆ *Conventional Assumption:* The good of the institution is more important than the good of its members.

*Alternative Assumption:* Happy and healthy individuals make a good institution; individuals come first.

*Meaning in Practice:* Consistent attention to staff development, well-being, and renewal through an ethic of care and community are essential.

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◆ *Conventional Assumption:* Teaching and service activities do little to advance the reputation of the institution.

*Alternative Assumption:* More emphasis on equitable valuing of activities is likely to enhance an institution's reputation among prospective students and faculty.

*Meaning in Practice:* Attention is paid to institutional ethos and development of norms of collegiality, community, and mutual respect and care.

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◆ *Conventional Assumption:* Prevailing hierarchies are maintained through differential treatment of faculty members based on seniority, status, race, class, and gender.

*Alternative Assumption:* Equitable treatment of individuals and the valuing of diverse perspectives enrich individual and institutional quality of life.

*Meaning in Practice*: A serious and extensive re-examination of the values, goals, policies, and practices of the reward system is required.

Collectively, the articles in this issue expand upon the impact that the conventional assumptions that we have outlined have had on the lives and work of teacher educators. But, more importantly, they provide insights into how the alternative assumptions that we have proposed might be adopted and implemented by university administrators and teacher educators to create more manageable, balanced, effective and, ultimately, more satisfying institutional and professional environments than our current work contexts permit. These articles elaborate upon the possible ways forward we have offered in our brief consideration of what these alternative assumptions might mean in practice and entertain hope that, collaboratively, we might find ways to transcend the publish or perish syndrome that plagues the lives of so many teacher educators.

#### **Note**

1. The research represented in the multi-media installation was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and was exhibited at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Montreal, Quebec and at the 1999 Canadian Society for the Study of Education Conference in Sherbrooke, Quebec.

#### **References**

- Cole, A.L., Knowles, J.G., brown, b., & Buttignol, M. (1999, April). Living in paradox: A multimedia representation of teacher educators' lives in context. Installation exhibit presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal Quebec.