Dancing in the ditches: reflecting on the capacity of a university/school partnership to clarify the role of a teacher educator

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Dancing in the ditches: reflecting on the capacity of a university/school partnership to clarify the role of a teacher educator

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This paper used the data collected from reflective diaries, semi-structured interviews and surveys to identify and examine common themes identified in the roles required and/or perceived for teacher educators by both teachers and teacher educators. Collaboration, discussion and critique enabled personal reflection as teacher educators worked as partners to schools in a state-sponsored teaching and learning skills project. We have termed the collaboration in such an interactive project as one of ‘dancing in the ditches’, often requiring both groups to get out of their comfortable spaces and engage with each other in constantly moving situations. The teacher educators were required to be change agents at the interface of theory and practice and their experiences reflected individual journeys, but their reflections have ongoing implications for clarifying and professionalising the role of teacher educators.

Keywords: school partnerships; teacher educators; teacher professional development; action research; role of teacher educator

The identifiable characteristics and identity of teacher educators in higher education institutes are often lost in the discussions of whether employees of universities should be either teachers or academics (Skelton 2012). Internationally, most teacher education programmes are working to enhance their roles as part of a triangle of effort between training/educating pre-service teachers, collaborating with practising school teachers and working with academic/university-based educators and researchers. Teacher educators fill a niche in this three-way relationship – a niche that involves them mediating between all three. As noted by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), this type of role, with its multiple facets of practitioner interaction, has the potential to collide with universities’ traditional role of research and research exposition, which tends to ignore teaching and service, and also the school’s role as the advocate of practice, which tends to ignore research. Metaphors of difference, such as border crossing (Giroux 1992) and crossing barriers, are often associated with these types of collaborative connections and the role of the teacher educator can be seen as one that is constantly moving and constantly mediating in an effort to bring all sides of the triangle together. As such, it is a powerful role but not often acknowledged as such in discourses of higher education. Bourdieu’s (1977) notions of habitus, field and capital are used to explicate this role as it emerges in practice in a school-based professional development programme. The metaphor of ‘dancing

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in the ditches’ is used to illuminate how an examination of different worlds colliding allows greater acknowledgement of professional identity.

Teacher educators in higher education institutions have long been recognised as a group who live between two worlds. In Australia, teacher educators have changed from being teachers of the craft of teaching, or of a reflective approach to craft strategies, to having a more scholarly and theoretical focus (Aspland 2006). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) identified that the challenge for university-based teacher educators is to work at the boundaries (or work ‘in the ditches’) of the dialectic of inquiry and practice, rethinking what counts as research and service while also recasting university teaching and pedagogy as more collaborative and co-constructed processes rather than acts. In the Australian context, this has become even more difficult as more detailed and explicit teacher accreditation processes are now driving the nature and structure of teacher education programmes (AITSL 2010). This is not simply an Australian issue. Zeichner (2006) pointed out that teacher accreditation processes and high-stakes testing programmes, along with teacher shortages in the USA, have impacted on teacher education, resulting in teachers who are ‘good enough’ to comply being accepted into the teaching profession. This culture of compliance affects both the teaching profession and teacher education and professional development, with critical professional scrutiny of pedagogy, curriculum and policy becoming rarer. In the UK, Murray (2008) argued that the lists of teacher proficiencies, often based on technical craft knowledge, has led to a devaluing of the work of teacher educators in higher education institutions, with resultant marginalisation of their influence and a lack of confidence and cohesion in their ranks. In addition, the lack of opportunity for many teacher educators to participate in research because of the lack of research funding for teacher education faculties creates difficulty when justifying their role as either researchers or practitioner researchers (Murray 2010).

One response to the demoralisation and lack of recognition of the teacher educator is to consider ways to clarify and professionalise their work. In the USA and the Netherlands, there have been movements to develop some standards for teacher educators, often urging teacher educators themselves to develop these standards, but there has been little work done to date, despite the recognition that the quality of teacher educators indirectly contributes to the quality of our education systems (Snoek, Swennen, and van der Klink 2010). What research there is in the European context indicates a disparate and uncertain group with differing professional identities (Murray 2008). In fact Phelan’s (2010) argument that teacher professionalism can limit identity can also apply to teacher educators. Once again using the language of boundaries, she argued that ‘human beings constantly exceed and frustrate prior identifications, often contradicting their own expressed and deepest commitments’ (317). She argued that setting professional designation establishes professional boundaries, separating rather than including. Boundary setting can diminish roles even in the cause of professional identification.

If, however, teacher educators can be identified as a professional group, the question remains as to the qualities we would expect from them. As Murray (2008) pointed out, their role as ‘change agents’ (Day 2004), knowledge producers and public intellectuals (Cochran-Smith 2005) has not been clarified and as a group they are often acknowledged only in relation to other professional and para-professional groups – academic, teacher, consultant, administrator, negotiator. What does emerge from this previous research as a unique role for the teacher educator is that of
‘identifying the inter-relationships between what is taught (the ‘content’) and how (the pedagogical modes used)’ involving a personal pedagogy, which is often idiosyncratic and can be inspirational (Murray 2008, 27). The role of teacher educator is also one of service, of social and moral exercise (Murray 2008). Additionally, the large numbers of teacher educators who identify with action research approaches to problem solving along the content/pedagogy fault lines in practitioner research, is indicative of their approach to addressing issues, and often guides their roles in schools and universities (Campbell and McNamara 2010). Teacher educators also enable the building of Mode 2 knowledge (knowledge created in transdisciplinary social and economic contexts) thus facilitating the removal of the academic hold on what is seen as ‘true’ knowledge (Edwards, Sebba, and Rickinson 2007; Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2009). They thus have a transformational role in higher education. They can also take a transformative role in schools.

Some of the key recommendations of the Ramsey Report (2000) in Australia were that initial teacher education should be reconnected with schools. Although not actually acknowledging the long history of university-school partnerships, which may be able to deliver the reflective teacher educator/practitioner envisaged, Ramsey’s contention that there should be improvements and preparation for new teachers in rapidly changing societal and educational contexts, and to consider how to make the relationships between schools and teacher education sites more meaningful, continues to be an international imperative (Maandag et al. 2007). The alternative is a feeling of disjunction often experienced by beginning teachers where what they learned at university is seen to be different to what they experience in the professional work site – the school (McCormack and Thomas 2003). The acknowledgement that there is some sort of cultural divide between the two groups is important when projects that demand their collaboration, as in the project described in this study, a self-styled action learning project for teacher participants and an action research project for the teacher educators, are envisaged. However, as in all studies of intercultural understanding, it is difficult to clarify and conceptualise the exact dimensions of the differences.

A key role of a teacher educator is to work the interface between the academic world, the world of teacher education and the world of the practising teachers. Working in the ‘ditches’ or fields (Bourdieu 1977) between these worlds allows us a mirror to clarify and understand the negotiation of these worlds and to better understand how others perceive them. As Bourdieu would have it (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), we all have our own personal and professional ways of looking at the world (our cultural, social and economic capital) and our personal and professional habitus, our dispositions, tendencies, propensities and inclinations built up over years of enculturation. Working with others who will not have the same habitus and cultural capital will undoubtedly cause some level of conflict in this particular field of engagement – a school action learning project – and the interaction on such a field can provide a lens to examine each group’s ways of thinking and doing in a reflexive manner. Bernstein (1996) argued that a school’s ideology can be seen as a ‘construction in a mirror through which images are reflected’ (7) and, as such, partnerships between schools and universities can likewise be compared. The school can be seen more clearly through the university’s portrayal of it and, likewise, the university and its teacher educators can be seen as a reflection of the images portrayed in the school setting. Both teachers and teacher educators struggle with questions such as: ‘Who recognises themselves
as of value? What other images are excluded by the dominant image of value so that some [participants] are unable to recognise themselves? Whose voices are heard? Who is speaking? Who recognizes themselves as of value? Who is hailed by this voice? For whom is it familiar?” (Bernstein 1996, 7). In our context other question can be raised: Who is the teacher educator? Do they have a distinctive voice? Or are they simply school teachers in a different context? Their interaction in the ‘ditch’ can provide important perspectives on the role of the teacher educator and can have implications for teacher educators’ professional identity.

It was decided to use an experience where three teacher educators worked in a school-university partnership project with an action research focus to clarify the role of the teacher educator. The personal reflective diaries of three teacher educators, along with surveys of teachers and school managers in a collaborative project, were analysed as a guide to perceptions of difference, sameness or hybridity between the groups and how this may vary over time in an action research approach in order to clarify aspects of a teacher educators’ role. We have termed the collaboration in such an interactive project as one of ‘dancing in the ditches’, implying that the meeting of the two groups (teachers and teacher educators) required them to get out of their comfortable meadows or fields (Boudieu 1977) and interact in a number of different areas that needed some space, not just a simple climbing of walls or crossing a border. The metaphor of ‘dancing in the ditches’ was developed to try to conceptualise this space of interaction. It was not a comfortable place and could hold unexpected dangers (note: in Australia a ditch is usually dirty and dusty but can be filled with water and unexpected wildlife), it was between places that were more familiar to both parties and it afforded space (but not much) to work through the issues. It was not a formal space such as a border or a forum, and the manner of interaction was also less formal, could be both close and distant (as in a dance) and could be undertaken according to a number of ‘tunes’.

The collaborative project

The New South Wales (NSW) Quality Teaching Action Learning (QTAL) initiative (Department of Education and Training NSW 2003) was a major professional development initiative that encouraged teachers to become familiar with the language and concepts of the NSW model of pedagogy and its potential to improve their professional practice. The project focus on Quality Teaching (QT) arose from the widely held assumption that the quality of teaching in classrooms has a very strong and direct effect on the overall quality of education for students (Rowe and Rowe 2002). Individual schools were encouraged to identify areas of need and to develop projects to assist in improving the quality of teaching and learning. These long-term projects were encouraged by the NSW Department of Education due to the widely held belief both here and in other countries, such as the UK, that ‘the majority of participants who do take part in longer-term professional development do change one or more aspects of their teaching practice’ (Boyle, While, and Boyle 2004, 64).

Those schools that were successful in gaining funding for their long-term (approximately nine-month) projects had teacher teams that were required to engage in action learning to investigate their own teaching practice and were to use a teacher educator in order to provide an outside perspective on their projects. The action learning process used in the QTAL project required all participants to engage in different levels of reflection, sharing, action, planning, facilitating, questioning
and observation depending on the schools’ individual project focus and progression. It was the aim of the QTAL project to ensure the academic partner supported teachers as learners, enabling control over their own professional development and assisting moves toward more university-school collaborative partnerships (Ewing 2004; Ewing et al. 2004; Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2009; Johnson Peters, and Williams 1999; Ladwig, Currie, and Chadbourne 1994; Sachs 1997; Zeichner 1995). It was decided that this experience, where teacher educators interacted in school-based projects, would provide ideal material for explicating the teacher educator role in that both groups needed to engage ‘in the ditch’ and the differing perspectives of that ditch allowed a mirror to be held on them both through which an image of the role could be ascertained.

Methods
The three academic partners involved worked individually with a school or group of schools in different educational and geographic settings over a nine-month period. The study participants comprised a group of 35 teachers, including both classroom teachers and school executive members who taught at one of the 11 schools involved in three different contexts – a large city secondary school; a country primary school; and a group of nine primary schools who were feeder schools to a large secondary collegiate of two comprehensive junior secondary schools and a senior college located in a city. One academic was allocated to each context. The teachers involved in the study were generally experienced teachers who had been teaching at their school for an extended period of time. Some of them were ex-students of the academic partners. The academic partners had extensive teaching experience and then subsequent extensive teacher educator experience.

Although each of the schools/contexts had their own projects, which were designed to meet the individual needs of the school, they were all using the same theoretical pedagogical framework of the NSW QT model and methodology in the form of action learning to accomplish their goals. Each school or group of schools had the equivalent of a minimum of five days of time available to them from an allocated academic partner to use in a way that best suited their individual needs and projects. In reality, the time allocated by the academic partner to the school projects was much greater in order to fulfil the project outcomes. In fact, the three partners recorded 39 personal reflective diary entries associated with separate visits to schools and not all visits were reflected upon.

The instruments used to collect the data for this study were a survey, which was administered to participating teachers pre- and post-project, individual structured interviews, which were administered to project team leaders pre- and post-study, and personal reflective journals completed by the three academic partners throughout the duration of the projects. The survey used open-ended questions to seek participant teachers’ understandings of the role of the academic partner and the role academic partnerships play in professional development (there were 80 different comments associated with the academic partner role). The project team leaders at each of the three sites were to be interviewed about the academic partner’s role before and after the project but, due to their time limitations, only five of these were carried out (these provided about 400 words of comments). Additionally, each academic partner completed a reflective journal with a guided framework, based on previous work with pre service teachers (Grushka, Hinde-McLeod and Reynolds
2005), before and after each school-based activity throughout the length of the projects. It should be noted that the journal format allowed the academic partners to consider the technical/practical and critical aspects of both the individual session that they were about to encounter or encountered and the entire school project and the personal aspects of their involvement in the each session in the projects (this amounted to 5000 words of comments). The academic partners met at regular intervals to talk about the challenges they encountered and to share resources and ideas. They shared their reflections and considered how their roles were developing. They considered how they were progressing and helped each other plan new strategies to assist in their roles in an action research approach.

The resultant data comprised 60 surveys, 39 diary entries and 5 individual structured interviews. All data were scrutinised for glimpses of how each group viewed the role of the teacher educator. Firstly the data was screened in an emerging grounded-theory approach (Creswell 2009). Emerging themes that have been found from the interviews and reflective diaries were synthesised with thematic analysis following the principles of coding associated with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990) in order to describe the main issues identified by participants (i.e., descriptive or open coding), to identify the links between issues raised by participants (i.e., topic or axial coding) and to propose higher order conceptualisation of the main themes which have emerged (i.e., analytic or selective coding). Then elements of the role of the teacher educator, including the role of an action researcher, as identified above in the literature review, were added to the mix for clarification. The researchers listed all references to academic partner roles and behaviours and then sorted them together into the categories identified.

What is the role of a teacher educator?

The role of the teacher educator that emerged from the study is demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2. Some descriptive comments from the surveys and reflective diaries were used to illustrate roles described but these were kept to a minimum to enhance readability.

Obviously the teacher educators had a longer list and a more extensive view of their role, one that changed and developed over time. At the beginning of the partnership and at the end, the teachers’ view of the teacher educator was largely a practical/technical one – someone who was there to help to get a specific job done to achieve certain outcomes. The teacher educator also saw their role in that light, but also focused much more on a mediating role. It was less easy to quantify and less easy to assess. The teacher educators saw that they needed to ‘dance in the ditch’ – be much more reflexive – than the teachers. For example, the teachers envisaged the role of the teacher educator as there to install enthusiasm, to motivate and to provide direction. The teacher educators saw their role as linking, installing enthusiasm, motivating, communicating, supporting. In other words, the teacher educators saw themselves as providing process skills, not necessarily answers, for teachers. They tried to give teachers capacity to build their own professional development. They therefore needed to be more responsive to change and alert to communication issues. This ‘ditch’ that both groups were interacting in provided the ground for the teacher educators to be responsive to teacher needs. They were facilitators. All the roles both groups envisaged for the teacher educators had elements of movement, of initiating or being responsive to change (of reacting to
Table 1. Roles identified by teachers for the teacher educators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles identified by teachers for the teacher educators</th>
<th>Descriptive comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generalist administration support provider</td>
<td>‘… to gather evidence, assist to interpret data to inform the community’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical friend</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research designer</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research validation</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact finder</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivator</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider of feedback</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource and reading supplier</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert knowledge provider</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development coordinator</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organiser</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm provider</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative fellow</td>
<td>‘…’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Roles identified by the teacher educators themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles identified by the teacher educators themselves</th>
<th>Descriptive comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>‘I am glad I prepared the resources I did as it gave a good starting point and something for the team to work with. I will have to get SPSS on my computer to do the first task which is analysing the data. I felt that the team were welcoming and happy to hear which I have to say’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiator</td>
<td>‘I was told what they wanted’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic researcher</td>
<td>‘I think we were all unsure about how to do this. They wanted me to give them things and although I gave them some things I mainly facilitated discussion. I’m not sure whether that worked or not. I was surprised that R. had asked for terminology but they hadn’t talked about this themselves and F. had the answer’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video analyst</td>
<td>‘It was good to have me there to keep them on task and enthuse with resources. Stop them going down rabbit warrens’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report writer</td>
<td>‘’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team builder</td>
<td>‘’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link between staff and executive as well as overall project leaders</td>
<td>‘’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient of expert knowledge to be disseminated to schools</td>
<td>‘’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change enhancer</td>
<td>‘’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time manager</td>
<td>‘’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
different tunes) and of occupying a difficult space (field). This was not an easy interface for the teacher educator and so the field was a ‘ditch’, not a green verdant space. A number of the roles identified above were unique to the teacher educator.

**The unique role of teacher educator**

As pointed out earlier in the literature, the unique role of the teacher educator, as opposed to the teacher or the academic in higher education, has been identified as ‘change agent’; user of personal pedagogy that links how and what should be taught; moral and social service role; action research practitioner; and creator of new knowledge. They are seen to have a unique transformative role within the university or higher education institution, creating transdisciplinary knowledge focused on social and economic context. The metaphor of ‘dancing in the ditch’ can help us identify what this means as evidenced in this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>‘… allows me to see how a school can promote change and reform’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible worker</td>
<td>‘Yes, teachers did guide the project. Decided how/who to plan with/when to teach-whether alone or in pairs-they would be able to reflect after session taught’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>‘… difficult thing is me trying to boost their confidence and make them feel less intimidated but not really knowing what they are doing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicator</td>
<td>‘M and N were very clear about the outcomes and how they wanted this reported. This was not necessarily made clear to me’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggler of time</td>
<td>‘I think I managed to win most of teachers around. Many seemed unfriendly when I arrived’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instiller of enthusiasm</td>
<td>‘Sitting, talking about these issues is so much more relaxing than the politics of everyday stress of [university]’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/university liaison</td>
<td>‘… developed plan for me to individually approach school team leaders and go over to schools with some set ideas and talk to them about it.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>‘I think just having time to talk about this and me being a sort of incentive for T’s to keep going is worthwhile’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As gleaned by such self-study, teacher observation and executive teacher perspectives the role of a teacher educator as depicted in this study does come somewhat close to what Day (2004) called a change agent, although perhaps not recognised by all as that. In fact, there is a strong element of teacher educators making change through subterfuge, or at least by affirming that the teachers did not have to change much, which then became a point of critique by all the teacher educators:

not sure all teachers really agree with project and having true ownership of project. [I] feel they are being told “this is what is happening.”

The teacher educators were trying to push for change, recognising that many of the teachers involved were not ready for such change and not totally committed to the project, and feeling that they were expected to lead and support and push in the same episode.

The teacher educators used their own personal pedagogy. Each of the three groups had a different conception of the role of teacher educator and different collations of these roles. It became an open-ended role. Teachers and school executive staff tended to have a limited view of the value of the teacher educator but then asked things of them that were beyond this view. It was a clear example of them testing the limits of the skills available to them – pushing out to learn more about the group they were working with and ‘dancing with’. On their side, the teacher educators were trying to be accommodating, often going beyond their mandate to ensure things went well, to respond to the ‘field of engagement’. The teacher educators used their own personal pedagogies to address the issues in the different contexts and responded in an action/reflective manner. For example, the two teacher educators working in primary school were confronted with much scepticism around the focus of the project:

[I am] becoming more familiar with QT terminology but not sure how much they are using it.

Warned me that many staff are experienced (old and sceptical about QT). They are seeing me as an outsider and resent change.

The school seems determined to make this low key- obviously Ts who don’t like change. … My group went home before the session on planning.

Teachers obviously felt overburdened and everyone wanted to minimise fears of extra things to undertake. Teacher educators were caught between loyalty to the project and loyalty to school executive and to school staff. ‘How can I help make these team meetings better? Aim to ascertain if there are some common elements that a number of schools are doing.’

They thus become project directors – a different project than what was envisaged but one that will offer something for everyone and still fit with report writing requirements. They tried to recreate a project that would fit with the requirements of all:

Once again the tricky thing is to get inside the head of the players – never really sure where they are up to and what they require and I guess they don’t always know either – I was mindful about research about teachers owning the change. Giving them stuff was not going to work and in fact the couple of ideas sheets I put on the back for children’s self-appraisal they picked holes in so really the research was proven – I listened and [that] approach seemed to work – some general ideas and then we brainstormed ideas – I think I made them worried that they didn’t know enough and I had
to calm them down – I got direction at the end [individually] about what they would like me to do next so that was good.

The teacher educators were clearly operating with an inquiry stance, with a view to transform as well as depict or work within what was (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009). They also exhibited what Murray (2008) called a moral and social service role. It was obvious from their self-reflection that they wanted to ‘do good’, to help teachers but not distress them too much with change, always responding to the context.

Conclusion: ‘dancing in the ditch’

The context is very important in such action research. As Bourdieu would explain it, each agent comes to the context or field with different cultural capital and as they interact in this context or field, the field actually changes and is modified by the struggles that occur on it. The context can never be seen as an unchanging entity and so must be constantly scrutinised in a research process (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). If groups are to reach across culturally distant spaces, they need to trust as well as accept that there will always be things that will remain a mystery to the other. We all have our habitus, with which we position ourselves to different contexts. We cannot and do not want to expunge this. What we have to do is work out ways to understand each other a little better and to allow others to assist us to do this. Bourdieu sees practice as an improvisatory performance:

the habitus disposes actors to do certain things, it provides a basis for the generation of practices. Practices are produced in and by the encounter between the habitus and its dispositions, on the one hand, and the constraints, demands and opportunities of the social field or market to which the habitus is appropriate or within which the actor is moving, on the other … this is achieved by a less than conscious process of adjustment of the habitus and practices of individuals to the objective and external constraints of the social world. (cited in Jenkins 2002, 78)

However, as depicted in the encounters in this study, the social field in which they operated is more of a ditch than a friendly and welcoming field and the movement in this ditch is more of a dance that can be slow and fast or close and distinct. The personal pedagogy of the teacher educator emerges as a responsive dance.

The personal dimension was certainly very strong in these reflective diaries and conversations. The whole action research project was devised by the teacher educators as a way to help the teacher educators negotiate the demands of such a project in the absence of any other forms of guidance. The three teacher educators aspired to be relevant to the teaching profession. They wanted the project to assist ‘their’ teachers to do what they wanted, whether it be implementing the types of teaching strategies required by the project or simply getting some time to talk to their colleagues about issues in the classroom that bothered them. In other words, they saw their role as empowering teachers, validating their skills, ironically in some situations where the teachers involved had no concerns about their own skills and no intention of critiquing their own practice (‘J. has done his great presentation on how they already do this’). Murray (2008) pointed out that teacher educators have idiosyncratic pedagogical approaches. From our study this was apparent as all three took different roads to the project outcomes. However, this was often as a result of outside impact or negotiation (teachers argued variously that the academic partner
was ‘[to be a] sounding board for future directions and planning’, ‘to provide theoretical background on the project’, ‘to be a facilitator between volunteer group and demands of QT’, ‘to provide an academic view point to project’, ‘to be explicit with QT language and as a tool for underpinning our pedagogy/easier to understand’, ‘to keep me focused’ among others). A teacher educator then becomes expert at response and works to accommodate varied viewpoints, while at the same time pushing a change agenda that accommodates difference. How do we write that as a professional criterion? The habitus of the individual teacher educator is very complex. Perhaps the roller-coaster ride that is a school partnership programme (Ferguson-Patrick, Reynolds, and McCormack 2006) demonstrates the need to allow definitions of professionalism of a teacher educator to feature movement. Perhaps, as Phelan (2010) implied, restrictive definitions erect boundaries that should not exist in the job description of teacher educator. The boundary of a field of engagement in such a relationship as the one described here is always subject to interrogation – the point at which the field no longer has any impact on practice is always subject to debate:

Fields are defined by the stakes which are at stake – cultural goods (lifestyle), housing, intellectual distinction (education), employment, land, power (politics), social class, prestige or whatever – and maybe of differing degrees of specificity and concreteness. Each field, by virtue of its defining content has a different logic and taken for granted structure of necessity and relevance which is both the product and producer of the habitus which is specific and appropriate to the field (Jenkins 2002, 84)

As the teacher educator is always ‘dancing’, the description of the role is always in a state of flux.

It is thus difficult to clarify and conceptualise the myriad views and perceptions of the roles that emerged from these partnerships in order to assess the exact dimensions of the role of the teacher educator. The teacher educators and teachers forged new pathways of working together. Boundaries of responsibility were continually tested. It was not a very comfortable space for all involved – a ditch is a space removed from the comfort zone of all participants and there are dangers associated with engagement in such a place. Teacher educators advised and enabled in situations where they were sometimes seen as not having the authority to do so. The power structures in the schools created different expectations of the projects for the different members and so teacher educators found themselves dancing closely with some members of the partnership and more distantly with others. Different perceptions of the project aims – the tunes being listened to – influenced the habitus of the players. What did emerge from this study, however, was that many facets of the role of the teacher educator could be elicited by examining them ‘in the dance’ so to speak. If, as Murray (2008) indicated, the key function of the teacher educator is as a change agent at the interface of theory and practice, then that role must be more closely examined as a guide to what the profession provides. It is only in the sense of movement, in the interaction between the academy and the profession, that the role can be fully appreciated. What emerged from this study was a substantial role, one that is constantly moving and so requires much expertise in responsive movement. The teacher educator does emerge as having a transformative role with some unique features. To develop a professional identity for the teacher educator without examining the role in action would be to continue to underestimate the skills involved.
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References


