Post Compulsory Teacher Educators: the 'even more' quality

Book Section

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[F] Critical Issues:

1. What does the scholarly literature tell us about post-compulsory teacher educators?
2. What research methods and methodologies enable the exploration of a scholarly silence?
3. What is distinct about post-compulsory teacher educators pedagogic being?

[A] The ‘even more’ quality

[F] Critical Question: what are the essential characteristics of a good PCE teacher educator?

This chapter takes as its starting point a comment made during a series of workshops involving professional conversations with some 250 PCE teacher educators. The initial stages of Crawley’s (2013) multi-method research project generated 15 ‘essential characteristics’ of a good teacher educator. Amidst such items as ‘innovative and charismatic’, ‘passionate about teaching’ and ‘the ability to model good practice in teaching, and knowingly - praxis’ - appears an elusive ‘even more’ quality.

‘The “even more” quality (demonstrating a wide range of professional confidence as a good teacher, but “even more” so)

(Crawley, 2013, p 341)

This ‘even more’ abstraction was later included as one survey item amidst 15 other defining features of a good PCE teacher educator. Teacher educators were then invited to critically evaluate the degree to which they ‘already had’ or needed to ‘develop further’ qualities identified as an essential characteristics for the PCE teacher educator. It is worth noting that this is an experienced and confident group of successful teacher educators. Despite this, an elusive ‘even more quality – that something extra that teacher educators do or are was identified by some 50% of respondents as an area for further development. In this chapter I wish to explore the critical issue of elusive ‘evenmoreness’.

[F] Critical Question: How can we grasp the elusive ‘evenmoreness’?

But it is worth noting that the willingness of a group of experienced and accomplished professionals to count themselves as deficient in a quality that has no clear definition might be reflective of the extent to which PCE
teacher educators have internalised the ‘discourse of derision’ (Ball, 1990) that has eroded the professional standing of teachers (and therefore teacher educators) across all phases of education over the past three decades. Morley (2000) suggests this willingness to accept a self as in deficit and in perpetual need of improvement (without being able to precisely define improvement) as a powerful regulatory device. Attention paid to a self in perpetual need of improvement is attention shifted away from values and ideologies. This notion of the professional self as a diminished self in deficit might reasonably be compared to the Christian doctrine of original sin. It induces a passive resignation that focusses on technical and operational effectiveness rather than subversion and the creation of critical public spaces for dissent (Dennis, 2015).

As I attempt to pin down the elusive ‘evenmoreness’, I suggest the ambiguity reflects a broader - more focused scholarly silence surrounding the PCE teacher educator. This scholarly silence resonates throughout the teacher education literature. To illustrate: in 2010 in response to an identified lacuna in scholarship around, ‘the role, development and professional identity of teacher educators’ (Swennen and Bates, 2010, p1) the journal ‘Professional Development in Education’ published a special edition which aimed to explore the professional development needs of teacher educators. Given my interest in the elusive ‘evenmoreness’ these 21 carefully curated papers might have been a good starting place to find out what additional development was required when PCE teachers became PCE teacher educators. What is stark about this special edition is that it does not feature a single contribution on vocational, further or adult education or any of its international institutional counterparts. The normative definition of a teacher educator is someone who prepares young adults to teach in primary or secondary school. Faced with such a scholarly silence it is no wonder that the PCE teacher educator may experience a crisis in confidence.

This chapter and the volume within which it appears emerges from this scholarly silence to elaborate upon the ‘evenmoreness’ of the PCE teacher educators’ being.

[B] What research methods enable the application of the PCE teacher educators’ voice?

Before elaborating upon the evenmoreness of the PCE teacher educators’ being, it is important to address the question of how. That is, how might I grasp the evenmoreness to amplify these voices? What research methodologies enable a trustworthy and plausible exploration of the PCE teacher educators’ being? The ‘reflective practitioner’ disposition has since the 1980s (Korthagen, 1995) achieved an iconic status in the literature surrounding PCE. This capacity to critically self-reflect is partly what defines the PCE teachers and teacher educators’ being. It is unsurprising therefore that in the special edition noted above – self-study is by far the most popular research method. I am suggesting here that a quality strongly associated with being a teacher educator ‘critical reflection’ also forms a strong basis for an approach to research and scholarship in teacher education: self-study.
[B] Raising the voice of the PCE teacher educator

My methodology aligns itself broadly to collective auto-ethnography: interviews, self-interviews and group discussions. My data have been generated through a series of conversations between a group of teacher educators. Our discussions – generated in an explicit attempt to pin down the elusive ‘evenmoreness’ - provide the analytical material for this chapter. Alongside the group conversations are two unstructured interviews undertaken in one instance some months before and in the other some months after the group discussion. All of these conversations are undertaken with colleagues who might reasonably be described as working friends. My own teacher educator voice is embedded within these discussions.

In engaging with my colleagues in a research enterprise – not only am I engaged with the world I study, I am – simultaneously both an insider and outsider: I am part of the world I study while being positioned in a very specific space in relation to that world. We are all HE practitioners but our terms and conditions of service do not reflect this commonality. My role as academic contact, carries particular affordances and obligations in terms of scholarly activity, teaching responsibilities and support for research. In view of our evenmore conversations I am, in one moment a PCE teacher educator and in the next a co-researcher generating data for analysis.

The chapter contributes towards the development of our theoretical understanding of broader social phenomenon – namely teacher educators’ pedagogic being. A being that implies something more than knowing about and passing on how to teach, a being that is indeed quite distinct; a being that implies evenmore than being a good teacher.

They [college teachers] can’t [teach teachers how to teach], they miss some of the key things. They’re not well versed enough in learning theories and what-have-you – it’s something they did on their CertEd that wasn’t important, rather than we who live and breathe our pedagogy.

Programme Leader (1), College A

Through and from this methodology I draw towards a conclusion that if there is a distinct pedagogy associated with PCE teacher education, a definable evenmoreness, it is that PCE teacher educators are what we teach. When our distinct evenmoreness is heard - it is heard as embodied and enacted.

[F] Critical Question What is the difference between being and becoming a teacher educator?

How different does being a PCE teacher educator [as opposed to a PCE teacher] feel, does it feel very different - do you think?

Programme Leader, College B
While all those present were able to quote some years’ experience as a teacher, the shift from teacher to teacher educator was a decisive one. Becoming a teacher educator was not the fulfilment of a long held desire. Indeed, the experiences of becoming a teacher educator ‘by accident [...]’ resonated for all of us,

‘I got a phone call [from the Teacher Education Programme Manager] saying there’s a job coming up, would you like to apply? We think you would be good at this!’

Programme Leader (2), College C

There is, as Murray and Male (2004) argue, a substantive difference between being employed in the post of teacher educator and assuming teacher educator as a professional identity. They suggest - being and feeling - as two distinct states; it is therefore possible to be a teacher educator without actually feeling like one. Despite successful careers in teaching, the 28 HE based teacher educators who participated in the Murray and Male (2004) study took between two and three years to fully inhabit their new professional identities. This disjuncture between being a teacher educator and actually feeling like a teacher education rests upon Southworth’s (1995) parallel disjuncture between a situational self and a substantial self. The situational self is determined by interaction with others; it is a contextual, contingent and transient self – that rests upon the actuality of being. The substantial self is a more enduring long term project less amenable to change; it is a feeling, dispositional self. The transition from PCE teacher to PCE teacher educator is complete when these two distinct selves (situational and substantive) become aligned.

That Murray and Male (2004) base their study on the experiences of school teacher educators is significant; two of the defining characteristics that constitute teacher educator’s substantive self are developing the pedagogic knowledge required for working with HE (i.e. adult) students rather than children and developing a research profile (Murray and Male, 2005, p 126). Neither of these considerations are resonant with the PCE practitioner who becomes a teacher educator on the basis of their substantive experience of pedagogies suitable for working with adults - sometimes in the context of HE (in FE) provision. While the research active profile sits somewhat askance for the novice teacher educator scholar, for PCE teacher educators something more fundamental is at stake. Our terms and conditions of service do not allow working space for scholarship. ‘HE in FE lecturers, although wishing to undertake research, are not given time to do so by management, as they [management] do not see research as a priority.’ (Feather, 2012, p 246)

Employed by FE institutions who offer HE provision, FE based teacher educators typically teach for the same number of hours (between 750 – 950 annually) as their FE colleagues. There is no meaningful institutional space for them to acquaint themselves with emerging policy and research let alone develop a research profile. My suggestion here is while developing a research profile is a desirable feature for the PE PCE teacher educator, it is unlikely to be a defining characteristic for those working in FE institutions.
I think that I don’t quite see myself as a HE practitioner because I don’t have the supported time to research; however, reading around current research has helped me to feel more like a teacher educator.

Programme Leader (2), College C

While there is a clear basis for suggesting that it may take some years to fully feel confident in the role of teacher educator – whatever feelings might shape the professional disposition, it is the actuality of being a teacher educator that interests me most here, being a teacher educator whatever feelings might surround it. One practitioner describes the shift from teacher to teacher educator and the associated feelings.

I had a journey from one place to another place some miles away. I left an FE College on the Friday and started at the University Centre on the Monday, and [...] then I just had to do it. I had to be that teacher educator from day one, so there was no sense of this slow evolution from being one thing to being another thing. I became that thing overnight.

Programme Leader, College B

The first few moments of teacher educator being can challenge a secure sense of professional self

When I first got here it was quite odd being in a room knowing that last week I was in an FE college, today here I am at the university centre and people are calling me up and expecting things from me, asking me for advice about stuff that I have to say I didn’t have a clue about and it took me ages to get my head around this stuff, these HE systems, I thought this is the most bizarre thing, what is this?

Programme Leader, College B

This is not to undermine the value of exploring teacher educator becoming. It is however to recognise that identity – including professional identity, is always and already a becoming. I am suggesting that developing, establishing and maintaining a teacher educator professional identity is an ongoing event. When the notion or experience of becoming a teacher educator is discussed in the literature it too frequently implies that it is possible to identify is a specific moment (indeed Murray and Male (2005) empirically identify that moment) when one stops becoming a teacher educator and finally becomes one – as a distinct state static of being. In talking about teacher educator being, I accept its inherent fluidity. That is, I work from a notion that teacher educator subjectivity is an ongoing. This allows me to make sense of the feeling that,

You need to be at the forefront of every new government agenda so that we can take that into our classrooms and so that our new trainees can be aware of it whereas if you’re a lecturer in whichever bit of FE then you don’t actually have to be bothered, you just wait till someone tells you such and such
This sounds to me like a distinct sense of pride in being able to manage the risk, uncertainty and doubt that goes along with the ever-changing policy landscape of PCE practice. In this landscape our situational selves are in a perpetual state of flux. What we are required to do, to believe, to teach and to embody have few points of anchorage. The teacher educators’ being is a fluid being. But, it is a fluid ‘being’ rather than a static ‘becoming’.

[F] Critical Question What is the difference between teacher education as modelling and teacher education embodying?

Teacher educators are required to model that which they teach. In developing the pedagogy of our trainees modelling takes places on two levels. There is an explicit modelling in as much as we show students what to do in the classroom, by doing it. We use creative and innovative teaching methods that can be adopted and adapted across different curricular subjects.

There is however another step required which is further, higher or deeper than this; a step that might be considered controversially as triple loop learning or ‘deutero-learning’ (Tosey, Visser & Saunders, 2011), an approach to learning defined by critically reflexivity and collective mindfulness. The teacher educator is required to stand reflexively outside herself in order to articulate her understanding of her own professionalism.

After an observation, I really want one of my students to question, “Well who gives you the right to tell me to do that or to look at that?” and I think, “Well somebody needs to do it.” I question that type of thing ... and I’m waiting for one of my students to question why I’ve got the right to judge them ...

Programme Leader, College C

The PCE teacher educator moves comfortably between levels and loops of learning, from the question ‘Are we doing things right (single loop) to the more reflective ‘Are we doing the right thing’ (double loop) and standing outside both of these to the critically reflexive ‘On what basis do we make well-informed choices regarding what to do’ (Romme and Van Witteloostuijn, 1999, p 452). As Loughran & Berry (2005) point out, beyond a pedagogy based on transmission, there is modelling. I this chapter I suggest that, beyond a pedagogy based on modelling, there is pedagogic embodiment. An embodiment that offers trainees insight into the pedagogic
being, how to reason, feel, think and act like a pedagogue. This is an embodied and enacted pedagogy. Accepting that our professional identities are a fluctuating composite of what we feel and what we think others feel about us, the PCE teacher educator articulates this sense of professional self:

[Being a teacher educator] doesn’t feel different [to being an FE or HE teacher] because you’re teaching, but I think it’s the expectations your trainees place on you. I don’t think students necessarily see university lecturers as teachers, whereas they see us as teachers because we’re teaching on a teacher training course. I don’t think their expectations of us are as lecturers, we’re expected to be teachers but teaching at a postgraduate level.

Programme Leader, College D

There are then additional expectations that students seem to have of their teacher educators that were not the same as those expected of either FE teachers or HE lecturers and while we are not fully defined by those expectations that are part of the professional landscape and thus something we have to negotiate. For some teacher educators this meant an ongoing relationship in which the role of tutor, mentor, manager and friend was fused.

So an embodied pedagogy is more or other then modelling; more or other then critical reflexivity. Moreover, the modelling we do is evenmore than modelling actual PCE practice. Our trainees are learning to teach adult students in FE; PCE teacher educators are teaching HE students who will become critical practitioners. In other words, the audiences – the purpose of our pedagogy - are different. What works and what is appropriate is different, critical reflexivity makes these dis / connections explicit.

Working in HE you’re not bound by FE restrictions on what good teaching should be, the more prescriptive elements of it. I don’t feel that I’m bound by the really silly things that you have to do in FE.

Programme Leader, College B

It’s a dilemma ...teaching trainees to teach in a way that we don’t necessarily feel committed to.

Programme Leader (2), College C

The PCE teacher educator models ‘being excellent to the nth degree’.

[F] Reflection on critical issues

This chapter explores what if anything distinguishes being a teacher in post-compulsory education (PCE) from being a teacher educator in PCE. Having accepted the challenge of pinning down the elusive ‘evenmoreness’ of teacher educator being, I have mapped a distinct teacher educator being as enacted and embodied. Using
hybrid methodologies - collective auto ethnography and interviews the chapter crafts the voices of PCE teacher educators to illustrate what it is to enact and to embody a space surrounded by scholarly silence. These voices emphasise teacher educator being rather than teacher educator becoming, gesture towards where and how the PCE teacher educators' 'evenmoreness' might be understood. The PCE teacher educators pedagogic being is enacted and embodied, standing in stark contrast to both FE teaching and HE lecturing.

[F] In a nutshell: I have explored the evenmoreness of PCE teacher educators using collaborative auto-ethnography. This methodology seems best suited to breaking through the scholarly silence that surrounds this occupational group. Paying close attention to teacher educator being rather than teacher educator becoming I identify an embodied critical reflexivity implied by the sentiment ‘we are what we teach’ as a distinct and defining characteristic of PCE teacher educator pedagogy. This embodied critical reflexivity acknowledges experience, context and a commitment to being excellent to the nth degree.
References


