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Understanding the Text of Teaching: Complexities of Comprehension

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Abstract: Learning to teach and learning to read have some similarities in the way the learning is enacted. Drawing on narratives constructed from semi-structured interviews with four Graduate Diploma of Education Primary pre-service teachers, a conceptual framework was developed. The framework included personal history, the technical skills of teaching, social aspects and reflection, to help shape a reading of the 'text' of teacher education. This reading revealed that, in this small group of pre-service teachers, reading the text was informed by what was happening in their lives, their personal history and their dispositions towards learning.

Introduction

Despite the apparent initial enthusiasm for the one year Graduate Diploma of Education Primary Program, as indicated by the number of students who enrol in one Western Australian University, many do not graduate. As a student advisor in the School of Education of this university, I became aware of the many influences that governed whether or not a student graduated from the course. Personal circumstances and how the individual coped with what was happening in their lives, their dispositions and their understandings about teaching and teachers seemed to be mediating the experience of becoming a teacher. As a result of these observations I became interested in finding out how the interactions of these elements acted upon the experience of becoming a teacher in an intensive one-year pre-service education program.

Graduate Diploma Pre-service teachers enter university having had an apprenticeship of sorts over many years as students observing the teaching profession. However, their learning differs from that of a real apprentice in that the learning is from a limited perspective and consequently they “underestimate the difficulties involved” (Lortie, 1975, p. 63). Pre-service teachers enter the university with a personal set of understandings, knowledge and vision of what teaching is and what teachers do. They are, as Britzman (2003) suggests, able to be engaged in the reading of the text of the teacher, however, the reading is based on their previous experiences of teachers and teaching and not on the “overwhelming complexity of teacher’s work and the myriad ways this complexity is masked and misunderstood” (p. 27).

Researchers in teacher education have long recognized the influence pre-service teachers’ past experiences and life histories have on their developing teacher identity (Alsup, 2006; Beattie, 2000; Black, 1999; Britzman, 2003; Lortie, 1975; Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002; Scott, 2005; Sleeter, 2008). Such research suggests that how the individual has experienced teachers and teaching and their life history has more influence over how a pre-service teacher understands teaching than what it is they learn in their teacher education program (Black, 1999).

As well as experiences of, and about education, dispositions and attitudes towards particular experiences (in this case becoming a teacher) are imbedded in life histories (Billett, 1997; Billett, 2009). Who we are, our ability to cope with new or difficult situations, are personal attributes that make up our “dispositions towards learning in a new environment” (Billett, 1997, p.14). The literature suggests that there a number of ways to describe dispositions in education research; from beliefs about “fairness and a belief that all children can learn” (NCATE, 2008, p. 89) and being “passionate, compassionate, fair, flexible, respectful and responsible” (Gallavan, Peace & Thomason, 2009, p. 50) to measurable behaviours, such as, adjusting or revising lesson plans, demonstrating enthusiasm and passion for working with children, and demonstrating commitment to the development of the whole child (Rike & Sharp, 2009, p. 67). However, for the purpose of this paper the understanding of dispositions arises from S. Billett’s (personal communication November, 18, 2009) who suggests,

... dispositions arise through personal history. We have particular experiences that shape our beliefs and values about particular matters. These dispositions then shape how we go on to make sense of, and respond to what we experience.

But what are also important in the developing teacher are those occurrences in life over which the individual has no control, what Billett, (2009) describes as “natural factors”. Those things that are part of the daily business of living and that “mediate what individuals subsequently experience (i.e. construe and construct) and learn through their encounters with the physical and social world” (Billett, 2009, p. 33). Factors such as the aging process, being ill or injured, the birth of a child, a death in the family, or world events, shape how an individual interprets the learning experience. What is happening in the life of the pre-service teacher can have a powerful mediating influence on the process of becoming a teacher. Dispositions, life history, and what is happening in their lives all act upon the process of becoming a teacher or developing a sense of the teacher self. Learning to be a teacher is “mediated by personal, social, and natural factors” (Billett, 2009, p.32).

Emotion, agency, discourse, narrative and reflection (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) have been identified as important elements in becoming a teacher or developing a teacher identity, but what is not so clear is how the individual’s dispositions toward learning about becoming a teacher and what is happening in their lives act on the process of developing the teacher self.

To capture the experience of the individual becoming a teacher, a conceptual framework derived from the work of critical literacy researchers’ Freebody and Luke (1990) and Luke and Freebody (1999) is used. The metaphor of ‘reading the text of education’ to frame the study has been developed to represent how four Graduate Diploma of Education Primary pre-service teachers negotiated the demands of the university program, schools and the broader community. The data revealed that becoming a teacher is a complex undertaking and that previous experiences, dispositions and what was happening in the pre-service teachers’ lives shaped the reading and comprehension of the text of learning to be a teacher.

Reading the Text of Teacher Education

The word text conjures up for many of us images of books and writing, however in more recent times the word text has come to mean much more than that. It is according to Kincheloe and Steinberg, “more than printed material as it involves any aspect of reality that contains encoded meaning” (1996, p. 184), while Healy suggests that “Texts represent social meanings

specific to societies and their associations” (2008, p. 5). In this paper the definition of text as a set of encoded social meanings is used to explain the text of teacher education. Both learning to read and learning to teach are imbedded in the social and within the text of teacher education there are meanings that the prospective teacher must comprehend. However, this understanding is informed by what has gone before just as in the case of a young reader. If a child comes to school having experienced books and language daily in a warm positive environment then the likelihood of success in reading is much higher. If a pre-service teacher comes to teacher education with a similar view of what teaching is and what teachers do and finds this experience replicated in their study and practice then the likelihood of them being successful is also much higher. This reading is dependent on the individual’s life experiences, how they have related to others, what has been done to them and what they have done to others (Gee, 2001).

However, as Freebody and Luke (1990) and Luke and Freebody, (1999) have pointed out, reading text is not only about the social but also includes the technical aspects, being able to construct text based on previous experiences and understanding that any text reflects a particular point of view. The experiences that the individual has across all aspects of life inform interpretations of the text and “if these experiences are not conducive to understanding the text, then reading difficulties will occur” (Anstey, 2009, p.91). As the learner reader brings to the reading process previous knowledge and understandings so the pre-service teacher does the same. To enable the individual to be a competent reader of the text means being able to crack the code, to understand how to use the knowledge of text, and to be able to read and recognise that particular ideologies and values drive education systems.

Although, reading teacher education as a text is not a new concept (Britzman, 2003; Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu, 2011; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1996; Segall, 2002), using a model that encapsulates the teaching of reading to capture the process of becoming a teacher, provides a strategy to analyse that becoming. It enables an understanding of how the reading of the text of teacher education unfolds and is informed by the social (understanding what it is that teachers are and do in the world), the personal (dispositions informed by life history) and natural factors (what is happening in their lives) for each pre-service teacher.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the model for teaching reading (Freebody & Luke 1990, and Luke & Freebody, 1999) this framework, like the model from which it is drawn includes the skills or technical aspects, the social and relational, the personal history and critical practices required to become a competent reader of text. Learner teachers like learner readers need to develop the practices of becoming a teacher because “Teaching and learning just isn’t a matter of skill acquisition or knowledge transmission or natural growth. It’s about building identities and cultures, communities and institutions”. (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 5).

To understand the experience of reading the text of teacher education, the framework provides a structure within which to read the participant narratives. In a previous paper (Glass, 2007), where one pre-service teacher’s story was told, the framework described here was developed as an analytical tool. Since then it has been refined to more usefully reflect the teacher education experience, and the following, drawn from the work of Luke and Freebody (1990) and Freebody and Luke (1999), is offered as a way of framing the experiences of the Graduate Diploma of Education Primary pre-service teachers.

<i>Luke and Freebody (1999) The four practices of the reader</i>	<i>Glass (2009) Reading the text of teacher education: The four practices</i>
Text participant - Semantic Practices Understanding and composing meaningful texts from within the meaning systems of the context. What the reader brings to the text as previous experience.	Personal History What the pre service teacher brings to the teacher education context as dispositions, what is happening in their lives and experiences of teachers and teaching and how these act upon the process of becoming a teacher.
Code breaker Recognising and using the fundamental features of a text.	The Technical skills of teaching Understanding and using the fundamentals of teaching - how to teach, what to teach, knowing about the learners. The link between theory and practice.
Text User – Pragmatic Practices The social act of using text in a functional way to communicate, and to understand the relationship between form and function of various genres.	Relational – the social act of teaching Relating to the real world of students, schools, university and the wider community. Understanding the social relationships inherent in the practice of teaching and learning.
Text Analyst – Critical Practices Develops understandings that texts position readers differently and can both constrain and influence the reader.	Critical Reflection Develops understandings about the self in relation to what is valued by the university, community and schools and how this can constrain and influence the developing teacher.

Table 1: A framework for exploring the development of the teacher self.

The practices are not hierarchical, but developed together with different emphasis at different times (Luke & Freebody, 1990, Freebody & Luke, 1999) depending on the situation and the requirements of the individual, so that like the learner reader the learner teacher is able to develop the ability to read the whole text of teacher education. To understand how the pre-service teacher begins to understand this text, it is necessary to hear the voice of these individuals as they negotiate the task.

Method

During the University Orientation week at the beginning of the academic year, pre-service teachers from the Graduate Diploma Primary cohort were approached to participate in the research project. Four pre-service teachers volunteered and were interviewed three times during the academic year. The questions asked were loosely based on the framework and were about personal history, experiences of schools and teaching, the reality of classrooms and the capacity to cope with difficulties. The first meeting took place in January before their program began, the second in July after the first major school experience, and the final interview at the end of the academic year. Each participant has been given a pseudonym. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to focus on the ‘lived experience’ of becoming a teacher, because

“Their [the pre-service teachers] knowledge of the social context and their account of the social arena are significant in the research” (Dunne, et al, 2005, p. 27)

To tell the story of the pre-service teachers an abbreviated narrative structure is used. The narrative being concerned with events and things as they are at a particular time provides “snapshots in time” (Beattie, 2001, p.3). It is chronological, meaningful and social (Elliott, 2005), and captures details of how each person has experienced life and learning, both previously and over the time of the study. The pre-service teachers’ narratives are important as they struggle to find themselves and so “finding the words, speaking for oneself and feeling heard by others, are all a part of this struggle” (Britzman, 2003, p. 43). However, a note of caution, it is my telling of each person’s story with my interpretation, and although I have tried to be faithful to the voice of the individual, there is always another telling of any story and events can be interpreted in different ways (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000).

The Pre-service teachers

Fern was in her fifties, married for the second time with two adult children. Fern’s husband was very ill with cancer and she was also looking after her elderly mother. She had come to the School of Education with an undergraduate degree in fine arts having entered university as a mature-aged student via an adult entry test. As a young woman in England her father had refused her permission to attend university and this had rankled her entire life. She had decided on teaching after many years of working in a remote coastal location as an art teacher and manager of a small gallery. Her husband also worked in the art field and together they had travelled around Australia making and selling art works. She found the whole experience of becoming a teacher very difficult and felt that it was beyond the capacity of any person to manage a class of primary children. She felt torn between the university expectations and those of the school and could not find a way forward.

John decided that he wanted to become a teacher as his job, as a missions and camp director for a church organisation did not seem to have room for further growth and promotion, and now that he was the father of twelve month old twins, he wanted a more family friendly occupation. John had a Graduate Diploma in Outdoor studies having studied computing and mathematics in an undergraduate degree and despite the job opportunities in mathematics teaching in secondary schools decided to enrol in the primary program. His experiences with adolescent children had brought him to the point where he felt that it was the early years that mattered in education. He decided to enrol as a part time student as he felt with full time work and the twins he needed to be careful with his time. He had a strong sense of wanting to connect to the wider school community. John felt affirmed by his experiences in schools, but challenged by issues around an assignment mark and his own health.

Cara came to university through an adult entry test and after many false starts studied sociology. She was in her late thirties, a single mother with two children aged nine and fourteen. She wanted to be a teacher to make a difference in children’s lives and to have a regular income for her family. She had experienced a difficult time in her own schooling and felt that schools did not suit everyone, and she wanted to work with those children for whom school was not a good place to be. Cara worked as a TAFE (Technical and Further Education) lecturer, a teacher assistant, a gardener and a photographer to support her family while studying. Her children’s father was returning to New Zealand and Cara was deciding whether or not she should go as

well, so that her children had regular contact with both parents. Cara did not complete any school experiences because they scared her and felt that although teaching was important she felt it wasn't for her.

Tom was in his mid to late twenties and had an arts degree. He was an international student from an English speaking country in the northern hemisphere. He came to Australia to pursue teaching and had worked at three jobs to raise the money to spend a year studying without having to work. Tom was the first person in his family to attend university and his parents had been very supportive of him. He had always wanted to be a teacher and although his own schooling had been difficult due to him insisting on being treated 'differently' he was keen to be a teacher because he believed that schools should provide for individual learners. He wanted to change education from within and felt that he had to position himself as 'other'. Tom was passionate about his desire to bring love and community to the teaching environment. Tom's partner was studying on the east coast.

In Table 1 the four practices of the learner reader and learner teacher are outlined and the following focusing on the learner teacher, outlines the interactive nature of the practices and the struggles that each pre-service teacher faced as they experienced becoming a teacher.

The Conceptual Framework in Action

Personal History

Personal history and experiences of teaching and teachers have an impact on the teacher the pre-service teacher is becoming (Black, 1999). Understandings of teachers and teaching, the vision of the self as a teacher all act on how becoming a teacher is experienced (Hammerness, 2003). The reading of the text of teacher education will be influenced by past experiences, and by present circumstances. For Cara who had been the rebel student and for whom school was not a pleasant place, the distance between her vision of herself as a teacher was just too great.

(January) *I want the classroom to be a fun place where children feel safe.*

(July) *I've been observing a lot (in classrooms) and I just don't know that I've got it. I don't know that I could be on task for that length of time for that many students.*

Her reading of the text based on her experiences meant that she found that what she valued as normal was not recognized and that she felt the normalizing pressures (Sinner, 2010) on her to become the teacher she did not want to be. This was also true for Fern and Tom, although for different reasons. Fern felt isolated and torn between the expectations of the University and the school. Her previous experiences teaching art had allowed her to work in particular ways that were not valued by the school. Whereas Tom despite the efforts of the school to make him 'toe the line' was able to maintain his view of himself as the teacher, and not bow to the pressures of conformity. John, however felt that his view of what teachers do and are, based on his experiences were articulated in the schools. This gave him a sense of himself as the teacher as the distance between the reality as he experienced it and his expectations was close. In terms of preparing to read the text, the closer the learner reader is to the text in previous experiences the more likely it is that the individual will be successful in learning to read.

The Technical Skills of Teaching

For many pre-service teachers what they see as teaching is based around what might be called the technical skills of teaching (managing student behaviour, teaching at different levels,

organizing groups, knowing what to teach) and this is what is important and what they believe teaching to be. Having had many years of experience in classrooms there is a sense that the work of teachers and teaching is known, but

“hidden is the pedagogy teachers enact: the ways teachers render content and experience as pedagogical, consciously construct and innovate teaching methods, solicit and negotiate student concerns, and attempt to balance the exigencies of curriculum with both the students’ and their own vision of what it is to know (Britzman, 2003, p. 28).

For both Fern and Cara, although their responses to the school and university were different, their vision of the teacher and teaching was not the reality they experienced.

(Fern– January) *I could see myself as being very busy in a classroom as it is very full on and being hopefully, the sort of teacher who is involved with the children.*

(November) *I don’t want to know the how and when, but the what - where are the guidelines?’ How can anyone work in a class with so many different children and expect to do it well. I had teachers telling me to forget what I learned at university and that the job was hell.*

(Cara – January) *I’d like to think that teaching is fun and that there’s joy, yes I’d like to feel that there’s a sense of joy.*

(November) *I haven’t done any pracs (school/field experience) because they scare me. I’ve done a lot of teacher assistant work this year and there’s something highly stressful about the position of the teacher. There seems to be a lot of yelling and raised voices in classrooms.*

The reading of the text was influenced by the interplay of their dispositions, past and present experiences and what was happening in their lives and they were unable to enact another reading to understand their experiences differently. Whereas Tom, despite difficulties in his final school placement and what he viewed as ‘poor assessment practices’ in some of his university classes, brought to the reading his sense of himself as ‘other’. This sense of himself as being outside the ordinary and his dispositions toward learning enabled him to make sense of his experiences and to be a successful reader of the text despite the difficulties he faced.

(Tom – July) *I found in my pracs (school/field experience) that the kids trusted me a lot more than they trusted the teacher, and if there was a problem even on the second day they would come to me first because of my attitude and my openness. I really try to be open and I find they (the students) really respond to that.*

The interplay between the personal and the social allowed him to read the whole experience from his perspective. Although he had a vision of who he was as a teacher, and although this vision was not always replicated he still was able to make sense of his experiences. Billett (2009) suggests that “experiences....are negotiated between the physical and social world and on the individuals’construction of them” (p.38) and it is in this negotiation that previous experiences and what is happening in your life can inform your ability to deal with difficulties. For John, with past experiences of adolescent children his issues were about managing student behaviour in a primary classroom

John – July *I had a bit of a problem with managing behaviour, because I was used to camps where noise and activity is expected. Although at the start it was an issue the kids did settle down with me and I got a bit of respect. I guess I have to get my head around what schools expect in terms of management.*

As John suggests, it is about him negotiating the classroom expectations with his past experiences and constructing another way to read the text.

Social Act of Teaching

For the four pre-service teachers, the social context of the schools and university were important elements in becoming competent readers of the text of education. Understanding how to negotiate the social worlds and to construct a reading of the text of teacher education requires a personal commitment (or disposition) to the reading. The construction of relationships with children, teachers, community members and the university staff are part of the whole story in becoming a teacher, "... what we learn through experience is shaped overtime and mediated by the capacity to experience and engage with the physical and social world" (Billett, 2009, p. 34). For Tom, relationships were at the core of his understandings,

(Tom – November) *If you're going to be a good teacher you obviously have to have the skills that a community wants. For me teaching is about building community based on love and respect.*

Although Tom had some difficulties working in a remote community, his reading of the text was informed by his understandings of the work of teachers, and his belief in love and community. What was happening in his life, and his relationships with the wider community were predicated on his beliefs and dispositions towards becoming a teacher. He was making sense of the text through the lens of his history and understandings about teachers and teaching. John felt comfortable in the school and university environment. It was what he expected it to be. His previous experiences with students on camps gave him, what he described as a 'realistic view' of what schools and teaching were like. He developed good relationships with his mentor teachers, with the students and the wider school community.

John – July) *The school experience was really good and the school reacted positively to me and I had affirmation from the teachers, supervisor and some parents. I can see myself teaching.*

With experiences of teaching and teachers and a life history that valued learning, John's ability to make sense of, and to interact with the text of teacher education was comfortable for him. Fern, on the other hand found it difficult to connect with the school and her university lecturers. She felt that the teachers viewed the university with hostility and that she was caught in the middle of this and didn't have the skills or knowledge to deal with any of it. Her reading of the teacher education text was made more difficult because of what was happening in her life and this informed her dispositions towards making sense of becoming a teacher. The personal, the social and the natural factors interrelated in such a way that she was having difficulty making sense of the text she was set to read. In much the same way, Cara's reading of the text, placed schools as sites of conflict although she felt that teaching was really important

(Cara – November) *I see teaching as the most important profession in the world, absolutely fundamental to humanity, to the human race, to our existence, to our growth, our progress, for us to make any kind of change, but I can't really see the vision of myself as the teacher, it's just not there.*

For Cara, her dispositions toward learning to be a teacher, toward developing her reading of the text of teacher education were predicated on her personal experiences as a student in school and as an education assistant. For both Cara and Fern the personal construction of their experiences was shaped by their personal histories (Billett, 2009) and therefore their disposition

toward learning to be a teacher. They read their classroom experiences as places of conflict and did not want to be part of that world.

Critical Reflection

To develop understandings about teacher education and teaching itself requires an understanding of the self and how that self relates to the social, personal and natural aspects that inform the individual's response to teacher education. What pre-service teachers bring to their teacher education text informs the reading of the text of teacher education. The critical, reflective practitioner is able to understand how the teacher self is being constructed in the teaching/learning process and is also able to see the broader perspectives and agendas of governments and school boards however, "Experience alone does not lead to learning; reflection on learning is essential" (Loughran, 2002, p. 3).

In looking back over the year the four pre-service teachers reflected on what had happened and how they had dealt with situations. In the case of Fern who withdrew from the program after six months it was apparent that the emotional load she carried in her personal life was informing her reaction to the professional. It was too difficult to deal with the complexities of teaching and study and the illness of her husband and mother. Fern was unable to continue.

(Fern – November) *It's been such an odd year starting off with such high hopes and ending up feeling pretty disappointed both study wise and personally. I have a sick old mum and a sick husband who rely on me and I feel as if I'm there for everyone else at the moment and I can't do anything about it.*

The overwhelming nature of the personal, the social and what was happening in her life meant she felt she had no option other than to leave the program. It is in the reflection about the experiences that links are made. "It is effective when it leads the teacher to make meaning from the situation in ways that enhance understanding so that she or he comes to see and understand....from a variety of view points" (Loughran, 2002, p. 38). For Fern leaving the program was the appropriate choice to make.

For Tom looking back was about reflecting on who he was as the teacher. His view that love and community and being 'other', were critical to the teacher he was becoming had not changed during the year and despite a difficult final school placement he was still positive about his place as a teacher.

(Tom – November) *I want to be other but it's hard and you have to work at it to stand aside. I mean in order to change a system you have to work within the system so you can't be too much in the other. My whole life is trying to stay on the periphery, to be the rocker but I don't want get rocked much because I'm the one trying to create the educational change, I'm the one trying to stir it up.*

Tom's reading of the text predicated on his history, his experiences and what was happening in his life did not change a great deal over the year long course. He continued to place himself as 'other' and to spread the message of 'love and community'. Tom, from the beginning was determined to complete the program successfully and to become what he had always wanted to be, 'a teacher'. This achievement was for Tom a mark of his success within the program.

As the year progressed John felt that he was in danger of not being able to manage work and family, so changed jobs so that he could work from home. He became ill and for the first time he spoke about issues that were challenging him.

(John – November) *I had a virus that has dragged on for months and I have a susceptibility to becoming depressed, having had previous episodes. Depression is one of those things you can slide into gradually.*

However he was confident that he would complete the qualification and that with his work from home and with the twins being a little older he would manage the workload. What was happening in his life began to disrupt the John's reading and understanding of the text. He was still committed to continuing, but ill health, had started to impinge on his ability to connect to, and make sense of what was happening to him.

(John – July) *I didn't get a good mark for an assignment and that was a bit disappointing. I have been sick and with everything, there's not much margin in my life. When I'm not able to concentrate, or I can't do a couple of hours in the evening because I'm too tired, the pressure goes up pretty quickly if you're not on top of everything.*

Looking back and reflecting on the year for Cara meant that she continued to think about her place as a teacher. On one hand she was committed because of the cost and time, but on the other she found it difficult to reconcile her feelings of ambivalence towards teaching and schools.

(Cara – November) *I think I like teaching and being with the kids, but do I want to be a teacher? I want to be more collaborative, and negotiate more with the kids, but can I be an authority figure in the classroom?*

The whole idea of teaching and the work involved in completing the Graduate Diploma were extremely stressful for Cara. Personal decisions about work, family and study were impinging on the teacher she was becoming.

(Cara – November) *The course was really stressing me a lot because it never went away. I'd have assignments that never left my head space and sometimes I'd be crying trying to summon the will to sit down and do things which seemed to be so irrelevant in the grand scheme of my life. I always found I put the course last in what ever I did.*

For Cara, the personal, her dispositions towards learning to be a teacher and her experiences of teachers and teaching were making the reading of the text of teacher education difficult for her. The meanings she brought to the text were not being reflected in her experiences and she was unable to find another reading to support her view of what teaching should be and she too left the program.

Reading the Text

Using the four practices of the teacher as a framework to analyse the experiences of the four Graduate Diploma of Education Primary pre-service teachers has provided a structure within which to develop understandings about the process of becoming a teacher, of comprehending the text. The framework enabled an understanding that becoming a teacher is a complex task and that each person who embarks on the journey to become a teacher has much to contend with. Personal history and experiences of teachers and teaching inform dispositions towards learning to become a teacher. The technical skills, the social aspects, and being able to critically reflect on the process of becoming a teacher are all part of the complexity of the role. The text of education is as diverse as those who attempt to read and make sense of it. What pre-service teachers bring to their experience, as life history, previous experiences and dispositions will mean that each person will have a different reading and understanding. Unless the personal

history, experiences of teaching and teachers and what is happening in the individual's life is deconstructed, then developing the technical skills, being able to be part of an educational community and being able to critically reflect are compromised.

In using the framework to understand how these four pre-service teachers were becoming a teacher, it was clear that they needed to understand the technical aspects of teaching. They needed to know how to manage children's behaviour, to plan and program effectively, to have good teaching strategies and to feel comfortable in the school and university environment. This part of the reading is important, but for Cara and Fern the reading was challenged by what they brought with them as understandings of teaching and teachers. It was challenged by what was happening in their lives, those 'natural' events over which we have little or no control and by their capacity to deal with these events. For both, their previous history and experience of schools and teaching and the events in their lives informed their dispositions to connect to the learning and to the becoming. This emphasis meant that the four aspects of becoming a teacher were not developed simultaneously and so for Cara and Fern their learning was troubled by the influence of the personal. The 'balance' in their lives was disrupted.

There is much to learn from Cara, Fern, John and Tom, and the complexity of their lives. Assisting them to deconstruct this complexity so that they are able to understand their initial vision of themselves as the teacher and know where this vision comes from because "deconstructing identity, personal history, and conceptual systems opens up a "pedagogy of possibility" (Aveling (2001, 46) is necessary work. Helping pre-service teachers read the whole text; the technical aspects, the understanding of self, the ability to relate in the social world and see how it all fits together in the critical whole could indeed open a "pedagogy of possibility" and as suggested by Britzman,

Everyone in teacher education needs the space and encouragement to raise questions that attend to the possible and acknowledge the uncertainty of our educational lives. For in doing so, we can begin to envision the discourses, voices and discursive practices that can invite the possible (2003, p.241).

Allowing pre-service teachers to rely on what they bring to the course in terms of life history, dispositions and knowledge of teaching and teachers to make sense of what they experience, can lead to the development of inadequate readers, unable to comprehend the teacher education text.

Conclusion

Teacher education students enrolled in the Graduate Diploma Primary Program have a high rate of non-completion of the program. This small-scale study indicates that there could be a number of factors for this non-completion. It is clear from previous research and from this study that personal history, and the experiences of teaching and teachers affects the way that pre-service teachers experiencing become a teacher. What is also clear from this study is that dispositions and what is happening in their lives also have an affect on their learning. The personal, the social and natural factors interrelate to inform the individual's reading and subsequent understanding of the text of education. This small group of Graduate Diploma of Education primary students relied on what they brought to the program to help them understand the text of teacher education and the process of becoming a teacher. Providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore the complexities of their lives as they take on the task of

becoming a teacher will enhance the knowledge and opportunities teacher educators have to better support the students enrolled in teacher education programs. Future research on how to explore these complexities within the confines of a Teacher Education Program will provide further opportunities to support pre-service teachers.

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