Grappling with Multiplicity: A Framework for Teacher Formation

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Abstract: On enrolment in a teacher education course, pre-service teachers embark on a complex voyage of self and professional discovery. In an attempt to assist them grapple with the multiple definitions of a 'good' teacher, the authors developed a conceptual framework that captures core elements of change, transition and transformation. Frameworks, whether descriptive, explanatory or predictive, inform the knowledge base for educational research and practice. Irrespective of the degree of sophistication of the framework, from a simple concept to a more multi-layered consideration, there is the capacity to present complexity in a more manageable form. The ideas, concepts and constructs charted through the authors' framework include notions of teacher, teacher identity, professionalism, theory-practice divides, critical reflection and professional teaching standards. Grounded in the concepts of 'self, 'other', and 'context', the framework provides a pedagogical tool for addressing all aspects of a mandatory unit of study related to professional classroom practice.

Introduction

Teacher educators frame their practice in situ by juxtaposing isolated pieces of empirical data, anecdotal evidence and professional consensus into a contextually relevant, coherent portrayal of what a teacher 'is', 'does' and 'becomes'. The centrality of this contextual interpretation of key ideas of the discipline of Education contrasts with other disciplines, which are organised by universally accepted understandings. By inference, educators will inevitably be engaged in an on-going conversation of what constitutes 'quality teaching' (Page, 2015).

In Australia, as in many other countries, teacher education is enacted within a regulated milieu of national professional teaching standards, standards that purport to describe what defines a quality teacher. Also in Australia, as elsewhere, this national representation of 'teacher' adopts a relatively mechanistic definition by concentrating on what a teacher 'does' and 'can do' as opposed to the more humanistic endeavour of depicting what a teacher 'is' or 'can become'. The purpose of this work is to argue, through example, that efforts to portray, prepare and further develop teachers may be better served by frameworks that assume multiple, as opposed to singular, depictions of the concept of teacher. We argue, with Gannon (2012), that teaching standards are "flat abstractions" (p. 29) and that "the representational idiom of standards has become so authoritative that it readily eclipses other ways to think and 'do' standards" (Mulcahy, 2011, p. 95).

The Context of Our Practice

For the authors, a pedagogical decision was made to juxtapose the mandated, standards-driven model against an humanistic framework of professional teaching in order to portray a more holistic view of 'teacher'. This necessitated the creation of the purpose-driven Teacher Formation Framework (*TFF*), to inform the design and delivery of lectures and tutorials in a new 6-credit point, undergraduate teacher education unit of study at one Australian university. Introduced in 2013, this unit of study, entitled Foundations of Professional Classroom Practice, is a first year undergraduate unit providing a theoretical introduction to working in the field of Education. As a foundation unit it is studied by all students across every initial teacher education award (Early Childhood Education, Primary, and Secondary) and is one of the earliest units of enrolment. The unit is designed to develop an understanding of the complexities of teaching, including classroom management and professionalism, and a "familiarisation with legal requirements and professional standards, including the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES), Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and other relevant NSW and national education authorities" (University of New England, 2015). The learning outcomes are designed to ensure that the pre-service teachers are grounded in both the relevant content of these topics and the discourse of education. One learning outcome of the unit in particular requires students to be able to "integrate the multiple definitions of what it means to be a good teacher and articulate their understanding through their discussion of their own future teaching practice" (University of New England, 2015, Point 7).

Having now complemented the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011), hereafter referred to as the Standards, with the *TFF* in this unit of study for over five teaching trimesters, this framework is shared as a pedagogical tool that augments the Standards with humanistic orientations to teacher change, transition, and transformation.

Contribution of 'Frameworks' to Disciplinary Knowledge

Frameworks are tools utilised within specific disciplines to organise inquiry, describe relationships between concepts, or structure thinking and action (Ilott, Gerrish, Laker, & Bray, 2013). When frameworks are employed in conjunction with the predictive and explanatory potential of theories and models, they "provide a discipline with an intellectual framework that stimulates advances in theory, research, development, policy, and practice" (Lambert & Biddulph, 2014, p. 16). Whether the framework is theoretical, conceptual, empirical or practical, the choice, definition and arrangement of concepts form part of a "wider meaning system" (Reeves, 2009, p. 11). Subsequently, this system is validated through alignment with direct experience and observation of the phenomenon in everyday life.

Education as a discipline is fundamentally concerned with the concepts of teacher, teaching, learner and learning. Despite the dominance of these concepts, the meaning system of the discipline remains dynamic and emergent. Consequently, the discipline is characterised by many efforts to describe, explain or predict key concepts, in isolation or in concert with other concepts, resulting in a plethora of many different models, frameworks, heuristics, and sets of guiding principles. Importantly, each contribution presents "an arena for debate in its own right" (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013, p. 615) which subsequently "changes and mutates and takes many forms" (Kennedy, 2014, p. 311). For instance, scholars have portrayed 'teacher'

in the form of an intellectual leader (Feiman-Nemser, nd), reflective practitioner (Schön, 1987), clinician (Calderhead, 1996), artist (Delamont & Anderson, 1995), extended professional (Hoyle, 1980), researcher (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), and executive (Fenstermacher & Soltis, 2004): many forms, one concept.

Bound by the nature of a negotiated meaning system, the task of theory-building in Education is a dynamic process of constructing from previously isolated bits of empirical data, anecdotal evidence or professional consensus "a coherent conceptual framework of wider applicability" (Reeves, 2009, p. 9). The product will be theories, models and frameworks. Theories tend to be "more specific, with concepts which are amenable to hypothesis testing" (Ilott et al., 2013, p. 1). When compared to theories, models are typically more prescriptive and specific, with a narrower scope. Frameworks such as national teaching standards are more descriptive organisations of inter-related concepts that can be used as a tool to organise inquiry and, if necessary, to critique the generalisability of existing models or theories.

Teaching Standards

Professional teaching standards (some are described as teacher competences rather than standards) are now common globally (Thomson, Turner, & Nietfeld, 2012), their advent seen as a response to enduring calls for assurance of 'quality' in the teachers of today (Wegner & Nückles, 2013). Many argue that the standards, while opening opportunities for discourse about the nature of teaching, also are used as accountability measures of neo-liberal policy makers (Mulcahy, 2011; Peter, Ng, & Thomas, 2011; Wegner & Nückles, 2013). This tension regarding purpose has led to the argument propounded by Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) that "the current standards regimes … have at their heart a desire not to build an understanding of the complexity and nuance of teaching practice … but rather to standardise practice, stifle debate and promote the fallacious notion of 'professional objectivity'" (p. 8). There would seem to be grounds for the criticism that "technical-rational teacher policy reforms" (Seferoğlu, Korkmazgil, & Ölçü, 2009, p. 209) have the result that "affective dimensions of teaching … escape the purview of standards" (Gannon, 2012, p. 67).

The purpose of the Australian standards is defined as "a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality. The Standards define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st-century schools, which result in improved educational outcomes for students" (AITSL, 2011, p. 2). While there is little to disagree with in terms of either the importance of enhanced outcomes for students or the need for quality teaching, the definition of what a quality teacher is remains contentious. Analysis of the language of the Standards indicates that these establish clearly what it is believed that teachers should know (theory and content) and be able to do (skills), but there is little emphasis on values or attitudinal traits. Given the ongoing discussion of the need for some form of aptitude test for either entry into, or exit from, initial teacher education, this appears to be a current deficit in the Standards.

Witte (2015) argues that teaching standards are almost universally "expressed in very general terms, in keeping with the principle of one-size-fits-all" (p. 566). A corollary to this generic approach of standards is that they tend not to assist pre-service teachers in the development of a deep understanding of the complex inter-relationships between the many aspects of teaching nor its highly contextual nature. As Gannon argues, teaching is "affectively, relationally and materially contingent, and … the homogenising strategies of current standards frameworks are ill equipped to recognise this contingency" (p. 67)

Despite the rhetoric about standards being seen as a supportive approach to teacher formation, as well as helping to define quality, there are concerns that:

> the role …has been twisted by some to be more about standardising, judging and dismissing teachers than developing and recognising them i.e., judgemental instead of developmental. Rather than being done with and for teachers, many measures advocated and being hastily and poorly implemented in the quest to improve teaching and learning are essentially being done to teachers and without their involvement, almost guaranteeing resistance, minimal compliance and inefficiency (Dinham, 2013, p. 94).

In essence, standards remain polemical whilst they represent a single answer to a sub-set of questions pertaining to teacher formation.

Teacher Identity, Change and Transformation

It is important to consider the images portrayed in different frameworks defining what it means to be a teacher because "students negotiate their images of themselves as professionals with the images reflected to them by their programs. This process of negotiation can be fraught with difficulty, especially when these images conflict" (Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008, p. 41). Throughout a teacher education program pre-service teachers need to grapple with possible identities, testing these against their perceptions of self and their already held views of what it means to be a teacher. Hong (2010) has suggested that identity work is vital as there are links between teacher attrition and the non- or delayed development of professional identity.

Rodgers and Scott (2008) state that identity can be considered through four assumptions:

> (1) that identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple *contexts* which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation; (2) that identity is formed in *relationship* with others and involves *emotions*; (3) that identity is *shifting, unstable, and multiple*; and, (4) that identity involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through *stories* over time (p. 733).

They further argue that "embedded in these assumptions is an implicit charge: that teachers should work towards an *awareness* of their identity and the contexts, relationships, and emotions that shape them, and (re)claim the authority of their own *voice*" (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 733, italics in the original).

The notion that identity (or identities) is (are) constantly changing and that there are multiple contexts and perspectives is not new (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Flores & Day, 2006; Hamman, Gosselin, Romano, & Bunuan, 2010), but teaching standards present only one possible identity. In contrast to grappling with multiple possible identities, in Australian teacher education programs pre-service teachers "must learn to describe their teacher identities through the framework of the standards as they engage in self and peer assessment, compile and critique evidence portfolios and participate in the performance management processes that dominate schools" (Gannon, 2012, p. 61). A new or revised framework, used in conjunction with, rather than opposition to, the Standards could address shortcomings with this current teacher education practice in Australia in which the Standards are the mandated perspective of teacher identity and where, it could be argued, the 'heart' of teaching is missing from the documentation of what it means to be a teacher. This thinking mirrors Fullan (2003) who argues "the purpose and passion that drives the best teachers" (p.10) was neglected in general statements of competence. Bourgonje and Tromp (2011)

claim that "the understanding of 'competence' is shifting … from a narrow focus on what a person can do towards a more holistic focus on the possession and development of a complex combination of integrated skills, knowledge, attitudes and values" (p.9). The authors of this article maintain that standards-driven practice requires ongoing critique in order to re-instate this more humanistic view of teacher and teaching more fully. To this end, they developed an alternative framework as the basis of their teaching approach.

The Teacher Formation Framework

The Teacher Formation Framework (*TFF*) was developed by the authors specifically as a resource for teaching undergraduate pre-service teachers and was custom designed using the SmartArt tool in Microsoft Office PowerPoint 2010. This presentation tool offered the potential for the framework to comprise a set of three visual slides, each of which utilises animation entrance effects. Together, these functionalities enabled the process of forming and re-forming a teacher identity to be presented to undergraduates in a phased approach over eight weeks of the lecture series (see Table 1). Consequently, students were progressively introduced to increasingly more complex and potentially transforming portrayals of forming a teacher identity.

LECTURE	TOPIC	STAGE of *TFF*
1	Backdrop to teaching: TFF - 'self'	Initial
2	Understanding your students - 'other'	Initial
3	Legal and ethical responsibilities - 'context'	Initial
4	Introduction to classroom management - theory and practice	Second
5	Classroom management styles - theory and practice	Second
6	Teacher professionalism - theory and practice	Second
7	Reflective practitioners - practice	Second
8	Teacher identity: the journey so far	Third

Table 1: Outline of the lecture series

The progressive refining of the three-stage framework is shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3. Common in the progression from the Initial Stage to the Second Stage to the *TFF* in its entirety are the funnel, the concept circles, and the Venn diagram showing relationships between concepts. A dynamic feature of the final stage is the arrows (which in the presentation are in constant motion) demonstrating how the key elements of the framework are continually 'filtered' through the funnel to shape the form 'teacher'.

The Initial Stage

The initial stage shown in Figure 1 shows an ecological model of self-other-context contained within a funnel. This representation links to the literature suggesting that teacher identity is formed through the inter-relationship of several influences including prior experience, the context of teaching and other factors such as governmental policies and

teacher education courses (Chong, Ling, & Chuan, 2011; Parkison, 2013; Swennen, Volman, & van Essen, 2008).

Figure 1: Initial stage introduced in lecture 1

This initial stage acknowledges that teacher identity is multi-faceted and that its formation is built on the inter-relationship of factors that have already occurred in the pre-service teachers' lives (such as their own experience of school), that are dependent on context (such as where they undertake practicum) and also the ways in which they are positioned by a range of 'others' (such as parents, peers and politicians). In the first lecture, the students are challenged to consider how these influences on teacher identity are important and whether any one of them is more important. The students are explicitly told that we wish them to examine their current assumptions and to make connections between their prior experiences, their beliefs and values and the experiences of their teacher education programs, professional experience placements and discussions with peers and other teachers.

In the first few lectures of the unit of study this framework is then used to situate the topics being discussed (refer to Table 1). These are introductory lectures where some of the students are considering the implications of topics such as a personal teaching philosophy, legal and ethical responsibilities and relationship-building for the first time. To both support and challenge, these topics are considered in the particular concept of self, context and other respectively, whilst connections are made across the three concepts. In conjunction with these discussions, pre-service teachers are also introduced to the relevant standards, pulling the two frameworks together and critiquing both.

The Second Stage

The second stage, as shown in Figure 2, is a further development as more theoretical work is discussed and students prepare more thoroughly for their first professional experience placement. The major components of the initial stage are now encapsulated at the intersection of theory and practice. This encapsulation enables inclusion of multiple ideas about 'teacher' and 'teaching' from multiple sources. For instance, ideas from the Professional Classroom Practice unit of study, other units of study in their initial teacher education program and those encountered during professional experience.
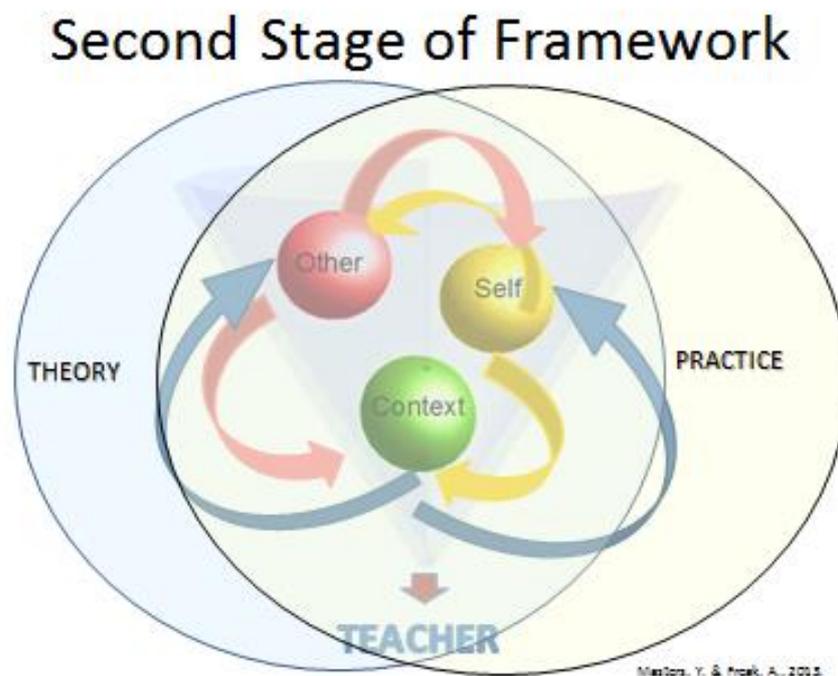

Figure 2: The second stage of lectures 4 to 7

In this iteration of the framework, the relevant Standards were again presented with a particular focus on Standards 1 (Know students and how they learn) and 4 (Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments). Both of these Standards were reflected in the unit's assessment tasks as well as being assessed during placements in a more practical setting. The inter-relationship between self, other and context was used here to expand the understanding of theory and to present a more complex view of how a teacher mediates these aspects of teaching than that presented in the discourse of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011).

The Final Stage

The final slide of the Teacher Formation Framework (*TFF*) shown in Figure 3 depicts the theory-practice concept now situated in the 'mix' of the other concepts contained within the funnel. Essentially, this representation charts the voyage of teacher formation as a reflexive process where pre-service teachers are challenged to consider the constant interplay of self, other, context, theory and practice as a deliberate iterative act. It draws on the concept

of reflexivity as "the essence of a new professionalism, exposing the dominant discourse of compliance professionalism as an oxymoron" (Bourke, Ryan, & Lidstone, 2013, p. 399).

Final Stage of Teacher Formation Framework

Figure 3: The final stage in lecture 8

When compared to the second stage, the final slide of the *TFF* shows theory and practice situated exclusively within the boundaries of the funnel. This more focused and contained portrayal suggests that all theory and all practice known to the individual contribute to the process of teacher change and identity formation. This portrayal of theory-practice suggests the need for on-going professional education and development during the constant evolution of one's identity as teacher.

The dynamic arrows shown in Figure 3 may be likened to 'sand through an hourglass' or 'sands of change' that sift through the funnel in the process of continually 'becoming' teacher. At the final lecture, the students are challenged to think anew about the concept of both theory and practice in association with the concepts introduced earlier, namely, self, other and context. The filtering of the sand through the five concepts emerges at the end of the funnel in a unique identity.

In summary, the three-stage presentation provides undergraduate pre-service teachers with a visual representation of an intellectual framework to organise their thinking about becoming teacher. This representation prioritises what a teacher 'is' and 'becomes' which, when presented in parallel to the Standards framework with its focus on what a teacher 'does' and can 'do', allows for a more holistic representation of teacher growth and development.

Successes and Challenges

One success of using the *TFF* is the intellectual rigour that has been reported by students. The emergent features of the TFF enables students to progress from comprehending components of the journey of transformation to 'teacher' as a cluster of disconnected concepts with minimal importance and meaning to a synthesis of inter-connected concepts of greater importance and professional significance. In essence, students are experiencing a phased or staged process of coming to know what a 'teacher is'. Teacher educators may have a sense that they are helping students move from a uni-structural mode of learning to a multi-relational one. This approach has been viewed by students, as reported in unit evaluations, and educators as intellectually stimulating.

Initial indicators of the success of the framework were undergraduate student comments volunteered during the formal evaluation of the unit of study. These comments, which cannot be shared at this stage as ethics was not sought for this purpose, related to the value of scaffolding teaching and learning. From the educator's point of view, this scaffolding aids judgements related to the scope and sequence of teaching and learning. From a student perspective, the *TFF* has the capacity to reduce cognitive load and enrich the ease with which connections are made between newly emerging ideas and concepts as well as between these new concepts and prior funds of knowledge.

A challenge of employing any intellectual framework is engaging with a diversity of learning styles. The *TFF* translates ideas, constructs and concepts into a visual representation of the voyage of becoming teacher. Although this visual is enhanced in the lecture series with auditory commentary, some students may initially find the metaphors and visual dynamics difficult to assimilate. To address this challenge, we have found that teacher educators need to augment the presentation of the *TFF* with academic literature and personal anecdote, as well as offering activity-based tutorial experiences.

A further challenge lies in adapting the *TFF* for distance or online delivery. The framework is well suited to electronic delivery since podcasts, presentation tools and video can easily capture the dynamic transformation of the framework from the initial to final stage. To optimise student online learning, educators must be prepared to monitor discussion forums and create online experiences to assist students to assimilate the new perspectives into their thinking. This is time consuming work, but has proved rewarding in these first iterations of using the model. Further exploration of learning management tools would facilitate authentic learning experiences and an accompanying mitigation of this challenge.

On balance, the authors believe that the potential successes of employing the *TFF* outweigh the challenges. Research, together with efforts to design more innovative teaching practices to advance the potential of the *TFF*, are ongoing at the university. The authors welcome contributions from other researchers and teacher educators in this regard.

Implications for Pre-Service Teacher Education

For Australian teacher educators, the *TFF* offers both theoretical and practical insights relevant to three continuing issues pertaining to pre-service teacher education. Firstly, justifying university-based teacher education as a setting for teacher education. Secondly, enlivening ideas for what matters in teacher education programs. Lastly, making claim to what may constitute 'quality' program outcomes.

A recent trend in Australia, as elsewhere, is questioning whether teacher education programs will remain in university course offerings. There is certainly discussion about undergraduate teaching programs and whether these students are mature enough to start their

teacher formation journey (Dinham, 2013). Evidence suggests that a number of institutions are abandoning more traditional teacher education programs based in universities altogether, with Teach for Australia, an initiative "to fast-track high-calibre non-teaching graduates into disadvantaged schools through an intensive training programme" (Department of Education and Training, 2014) being one of the leading examples. Arguably, the portrayal of teacher through the Standards has created a perception that teacher preparation can be more competency-based and therefore more suited to either school-based learning or college-based tertiary learning. A key feature of the *TFF*, to challenge this view of teacher preparation, is not simply the inclusion of theory, but the juxtaposition of theory with self, other, context and practice.

In the absence of a consensus about the literature used to underpin research-informed teacher education practice, the profession relies on conceptually strong frameworks to make programmatic judgements related to 'best practice'. Essentially, these conceptual frameworks foreground key concepts, ideas or constructs related to teacher change and development. An implication of the introduction of any framework is enlivening or re-enlivening the debate about 'what matters', 'what changes' and 'what is construed' when developing teacher identity. Participants in this continuing conversation should not be restricted to teacher educators, but also include the voices, opinions and experiences of pre-service and in-service teachers. As such, the *TFF* provides a stimulus for further thought, discussion and future practice. It also recognises that pre-service teachers do not enter teacher preparation from a vacuum: they enter with pre-conceived views of what teaching is based on all of their prior experiences. The *TFF* challenges these pre-conceived assumptions in a purposefully reflexive manner.

The *TFF* may be welcomed by teacher educators as a pedagogical tool to inform the design, delivery and evaluation of units of study with a focus on positive teacher change. A recommended procedure to integrate the *TFF* into a unit of study is:

(1) Check that the unit description, aim and learning outcomes align to an exploration of becoming teacher and the elements affecting changes to teacher identity.

(2) Introduce to the students the notion of an expanding framework. This is best achieved at the beginning of the unit of study. Describe how the framework will expand each week either through the addition of new elements or changes in the relationship between elements.

(3) Show, describe and account for the elements and the relationship between elements of the Initial Stage. For each element introduced, the commentary should include specific examples, anecdotes or cases to allow students to understand key ideas in real world contexts. Direct links can also be made to the Standards.

(4) Revise the Initial Stage as the students' new frame of reference. Progressively reveal new elements of the Second Stage. The commentary should expand the examples, anecdotes or cases from previous lectures to allow deeper understandings.

(5) Review the Initial and Second Stages to set the scene for the final *TFF*.

(6) Present the final *TFF* as a Frame of Reference (Lu & Curwood, 2014). This frame includes points of view for contributors to teacher change and habits of mind related to the career-long process of forming and re-forming a teacher identity.

Whilst situated in the Australian context, the developed framework has implications for teacher education globally. In Europe and other areas of the world, as in Australia, teaching is becoming more highly regulated and debate persists about the quality of teacher education graduates. Collaborative research and the development of more inclusive ways of describing and recognising quality teaching need to be an integral part of teacher education in conjunction with ongoing work in teacher identity development.

Conclusion

All contributions to the field of teacher education continue to bring us closer to a deeper understanding of the multiple ways of being 'teacher'. That being said, each contribution is inevitably bound by one set of ideas, assumptions, premises and conclusions inextricably associated with an agenda. The Standards framework, shaped largely by the need for accountability for teacher quality, has been presented as a case in point. The Teacher Formation Framework was created in response to the perceived need for a more holistic, humanistic portrayal of the voyage of developing a teacher identity to augment the dominant Standards framework. The *TFF* affords teacher educators a further chance to reflect on the question of whether any one framework will ever, or should ever, purport to capture the complexity of teacher formation. Ultimately, the efficacy of future teacher education practice lies in the generalizability of frameworks, models and theories to apply beyond the agenda and context in which they were created. It is hoped that the *TFF* brings our community of teacher educators just a little closer to promoting a multi-faceted portrayal of 'teacher' in our teaching and research: a portrayal of 'teacher' that embraces complexity and celebrates multiplicity.

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