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Working the Third Space: Reformulating Practice in the Transition from Classroom Teacher to Teacher Educator

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Abstract: The working lives and identities of teacher educators remain an under-researched aspect of teacher education. This paper reports on a collaborative narrative inquiry by three early career teacher educators as they made the transition from classroom practice in schools, to teacher education in a university setting. The authors confronted technical understandings, or ‘official stories’ (Zukas & Malcolm, 2019) of what it means to prepare prospective teachers, derived from contemporary standards-based policies about teacher professionalism. The paper proposes the concept of ‘working the third space’ as a way of framing teacher educators’ efforts to draw upon classroom teaching experience while challenging reductive understandings of teachers’ work. We argue that understanding teacher education as a ‘third space’ practice speaks back to narrow discourses of teacher education that frames it as the unproblematic transfer of practice from experienced to novice practitioner.

Keywords: teacher education; teacher educators; professional identity; practice; third space

Introduction

Teacher educators remain an under-researched professional group (Martinez, 2008; Murray & Kosnik, 2011; Murray & Male, 2005; Ritter, 2007). A common pathway into teacher education in a university setting is to take up a post after a career in classroom teaching. This move is often made alongside, or after, postgraduate studies in education (Berry, 2007, 2008; Dinkelman, Margolis & Sikkenga, 2006, 2006a; Murray & Male, 2005; Ritter, 2007). Prior research on teacher educators’ transitions into careers in higher education has found that the process is beset with institutional and policy assumptions that the transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator will be relatively unproblematic. The literature notes that practice as a teacher may be considered sufficient preparation for practice as a teacher educator, despite evidence that teacher education demands overlapping yet distinct skills and capacities (Dinkelman et al., 2006; Korthagen et al., 2005; Ritter, 2007; Zeichner, 2005). These assumptions are abetted by policy and media-political discourses that position teaching as reducible to techniques and the delivery of curriculum content (Berry, 2007; Korthagen et al., 2005; Loughran, 2006, 2011; Ritter, 2007; Zeichner, 2005, 2014). In these ‘common sense’ understandings of teacher education and how one becomes a teacher educator, it is implied that the focus of teacher education is the transmission of teaching practices and techniques from experienced to novice practitioners (Yandell & Turvey, 2007).

However, the literature on the transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator indicates that the process of becoming a teacher educator can be complex and may even present a “rocky road” (Wood & Borg, 2010). Furthermore, studies of teacher education by teacher educators themselves reveal the complexity of teaching and learning how to teach; these studies illustrate how this translates into a parallel complexity in learning how to teach prospective teachers (Berry, 2007, 2008; Loughran, 2006, 2011; Zeichner, 2005).

This paper focuses on a particular aspect of the transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator as a way of thinking through the complexities of becoming a teacher educator and learning how to “teach about teaching” (Loughran, 2005, 2011). We address how we draw upon ‘practice’ as former classroom teachers in our work as teacher educators, even as we also challenge reductive understandings of the place of practice in the preparation of pre-service teachers. In particular, we inquire into the “official stories” of teaching instantiated in policy technologies such as professional standards (Zukas & Malcolm, 2019). These *official stories* of teaching are contrasted with the complex and ambiguous status of ‘practice’ in the work of teacher education. The three authors of this paper made the move into teacher education after careers in classroom teaching, in our case, as secondary school English teachers. We worked together in teaching English method units to pre-service teachers over the course of one academic year at a Faculty of Education in a research-intensive university in Melbourne, Australia. We used the opportunity of being early career teacher educators together to inquire into our practice as teacher educators and to develop our professional learning and identities. The focus of our inquiry was the meaning of our professional knowledge of school-based teaching practice in the context of teacher education in higher education. While we found our backgrounds in classroom teaching an advantage in teaching about teaching, we also found our experiences complicated *official stories* that preparing prospective teachers comprises the transfer of practice from experienced to novice practitioners.

In the discussion that follows, we present a collaborative and dialogic narrative inquiry into our year teaching together in a sequence of units designed to prepare a large cohort (>80) of pre-service secondary English teachers. In the course of our inquiry, we explored the meanings of ‘practice’ as we used our knowledge of classroom practice to inform our teaching about teaching. As with other early career teacher educators (Berry, 2007, 2008; Murray & Male, 2005; Ritter, 2007) we brought with us into the experience of teacher education an understanding of practice that went beyond the transmission of technique, in an effort to develop reflective, critical professionalism as teacher educators. However, we also found ourselves contending with more narrow technical understandings of the preparation of prospective teachers that circulate in education policies in Australia, and which shape assumptions about the professional identities of teacher educators (Bourke, 2019).

The following research questions framed our collaborative inquiry:

- How do we draw on our practice as classroom teachers as we make the transition to teacher education?
- How do we negotiate with policy narratives of teacher practice as we form our practice and identities as teacher educators?

‘Official Stories’ of Teacher Professionalism

Our transition to teacher education came at a time when education policy was framing teacher education in ways that emphasised the competency-based or technical dimensions of practice, exemplified in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs) (AITSL,

2011). As Fleur took up a role as unit coordinator for the English method, it became a requirement of all initial teacher education units to document how the content and assessment aligns with the Graduate standards of the APSTs (ESA, 2018). Upon graduation, too, early career teachers are required to demonstrate how they meet the state-based teacher standards, derived from the national standards, in order to achieve provisional registration as graduate teachers. These policy conditions mediate student expectations of what course units in teacher education will provide; they also form a context for the development of teacher educator professional identities.

The policy environment in which we worked, with respect to ‘practice’, defines teaching in relation to a set of behaviours, knowledge, and competencies (Connell, 2009; Mockler, 2011, 2013). We discerned a tension between the policy emphasis on behavioural descriptions of practice, and a contrasting understanding of teacher professionalism that included critical reflection on practice, or models of critical professionalism (Hardy et al., 2018; Mockler, 2011; Yandell & Turvey, 2007). In exploring this tension, we drew on studies by Malcolm and Zukas (2009, 2019) on the “official stories” of work. *Official stories* of work are evident in documents and associated practices, such as position descriptions, performance reviews, accountability mechanisms, and professional standards. Forming a significant part of the discursive and practice landscape of our working lives, *official stories* of work shape the narratives we tell about our professional identities. Procedures such as the accreditation requirements for newly qualified teachers comprise what Zukas and Malcolm (2019) name “work about the work”; they influence the practices and identities of those charged with preparing prospective teachers to meet those requirements – teacher educators. Policy-driven practices such as professional standards act as “powerful technologies which change work, as well as ‘measure’ it” (Zukas & Malcolm, 2019, p. 260). Furthermore, “these ‘official’ stories are normative fictions ... which are used as a shorthand to define, quantify, manage and regulate” (Zukas & Malcolm, 2019, p. 260).

Standards-based understandings of teaching practice can be understood as *official stories* of what it means to be and become a teacher, and, concomitantly, what it means to be a teacher educator. In our efforts to grapple with the tensions between the *official stories*, and our situated understandings of the complexities of teacher education, we invoked spatial metaphors for how we saw ourselves moving between the competency-based and critical-reflective dimensions of practice. Spatial metaphors gave us a shared language with which to analyse the tensions and competing agendas we were navigating as we made the transition from classroom teaching to teacher education. Drawing on third space theory (Soja, 1996; Zeichner, 2010), we engaged in dialogic narrative inquiry into how we occupied a transitional zone as practitioners who were also charged with developing new professional identities as teacher educators and researchers in higher education. We conceptualised our practices of teacher education and inquiring into our transition into teacher education as ‘working the third space’.

This article contributes knowledge about the development of professional identities and practices of early career teacher educators. The focaliser of our inquiry was how we drew upon our professional knowledge developed from classroom practice in the teacher education classroom. Current policy discourse positions teacher educators with recent school experience as playing a special role in the provision of knowledge of practice (TEMAG, 2014). However, our reflections on our work indicated that teaching practice was not something that could be unproblematically ‘given’ or transferred from experienced to novice practitioner. This is something that we knew from our own experiences of developing our practice as classroom teachers; however, we found that this knowledge was in tension with a policy context that increasingly positions the preparation of teachers as the provision of a defined set of teaching strategies and curriculum knowledge.

Policy Context for the Transition to Teacher Education

The last twenty years has seen an increased policy focus in Australia on teaching and teacher education, accompanied by government interventions in the practices of teacher education and accreditation (Bourke, 2019; ESA, 2018; Diamond et al. 2017; Parr et al. 2019, 2020; Mayer, 2014; Rowe & Skourdombis, 2019). This situation is not unique to Australia, as reforms to teacher education in the USA (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Zeichner, 2014), the UK (Ball, 2003; Maguire, 2014; Yandell & Turvey, 2007), New Zealand (Locke, 2004) and Sweden (Hardy et al., 2018) strike similar notes of concern with the performance of teachers, and hence an intensified focus on the elements of teacher professional practice that can be subject to management and intervention. Therefore, our transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator was mediated by an education policy environment characterised by “global policy travel” (Sahlberg, 2011/2015) informed by a “performative” view of teaching practice (Ball, 2003). This has resulted in a “practice turn” (White, 2019) in teacher education that shapes and mediates the actions and identities of teacher educators.

In Australia, as in the UK and the USA, teacher education has been framed as a “policy problem” (Maguire, 2014; Mayer, 2014; Rowe & Skourdombis, 2019). As Rowe and Skourdombis (2019) note, policy is not only a process of problem solving, but of “problem setting”, such that the rationale for introducing reforms is provided by the terms set by government-initiated and private provider investigations and reports. In Australia, the influential Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) report into initial teacher education, *Action Now: Classroom ready teachers* (2014) works within a set of terms that invokes a focus on “practice” in preparing teachers. The *Action Now* report evinces a preoccupation with practice, with the word being used 211 times in the 118 page document. However, there are significant tensions in how the term is deployed. Among the recommendations is that “practice” is to be integrated with theory and that a “proportion” of those “delivering” teacher education should have “contemporary school teaching experience” (TEMAG, 2014, p. xvi). This recommendation, in addition to a framing of teacher education as something ‘delivered’, may imply an understanding of teacher education as comprising the ‘transfer’ of practice from more experienced to novice practitioners. However, there are also traces of other understandings of practice as comprising intellectual and reflective work to construct context-dependent and nuanced insights. This is evident in a reference to teachers in Finland and Singapore having the training to become researchers of their own practice as part of their initial qualification. Nonetheless, this apparent endorsement of an “inquiry stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) with respect to practice is constrained. ‘Research on practice’ is translated into a recommendation that teachers reflect on practice, via student attainment data, to implement “evidence based” strategies that raise “student outcomes”. Taken as a whole, the report communicates a series of tensions around its concepts of “practice”. On the one hand there is an acknowledgement of the inquiry and intellectual work, as well as the place of professional judgement, in teaching, while on the other, the report communicates a vision of practice as accounted for by the terms set by standardised student achievement data and the behavioural descriptors of the APSTs. Indeed, in their analysis of education reform in Sweden, Hardy et al. (2018) observe that the global trend has reshaped understandings of teacher professionalism such that “know how”, without an accompanying “know why” is deemed sufficient:

[t]eachers themselves are no longer being addressed as thinkers, designers, and co-developers of education who need an abstract, powerful, theoretical knowledge content ... teachers are reconstituted and addressed as ‘doers’ responsible only for communicating and evaluating official school knowledge

(via the teacher, math, and literacy 'lifts') and pupil performances in relation to a narrow range of outcomes (p. 13).

As we inquired into how we used our practice as classroom teachers to inform our practice as teacher educators, we found ourselves negotiating with these limiting, *official stories* of teaching practice and teacher professionalism.

Literature on Becoming Teacher Educators

The professional identities of teacher educators and the challenges of forming a professional identity in teacher education is the subject of several studies. However, it is also common to note that more knowledge needs to be developed about the professional identities and professional learning needs of this particular occupational group (Boyd, 2010; Dinkelman et al., 2006, 2006a; Korthagen et al., 2005; Murray & Male, 2005; Smith, 2005; Swennen et al., 2010; Martinez, 2008; Wood & Borg, 2010). The complexity of teacher educators' professional identities is evident in some of the conceptual frameworks researchers have devised to account for their roles. Murray and Male (2005) observe that those making the transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator go through an experience of "expert become novice" (p. 136). They argue that teachers in schools are "first order" professionals, whereas teacher educators working in universities must learn to become "second order" professionals working in the social reproduction of the profession. This presents teacher educators with unique professional learning needs, including developing a research agenda out of their practice, while attending to developing a "personal pedagogy" that suits their new position as "second order" teachers. In a similar vein, Swennen et al. (2010) outline the "identities" and "sub-identities" of teacher educators, arguing that role complexity defines the experience of educators in professional faculties. Their findings indicate that teacher educators negotiate multiple identities which include, but go beyond, the identity as a school teacher. The concept of "sub-identities" conveys the multilayered aspects of teacher educators' professional identities as they are expected to have knowledge of professional practice, to model and explicate pedagogy, while also cultivating a research agenda.

The complexity of being and becoming a teacher educator is conceptualised variously as "tensions" of teaching (Berry 2007, 2008), and inner and outer "conflicts" (Ritter, 2007). Of particular interest for our study, spatial metaphors abound in the research literature as teacher educators try to make sense of the multi-sited and complex roles they occupy. For example, Williams et al. (2018) invoke the *third space* as a way of analysing the work they undertake in a university-school partnership. Teacher narratives are used in their collaborative self-study to inquire into the professional learning and identity work engaged in over the course of a sustained partnership with schools. Likewise, Williams (2014) uses the *third space* to conceptualise the identity work of teacher educators who visit pre-service teachers whilst they are on professional experience placement. She argues that teacher educators' professional learning is furthered when they engage in reflection about their work across sites as this provides an opportunity to "examine their professional identities and beliefs and to understand how this impacts on their practice in university and in schools" (p. 325).

The uncertain institutional status of teacher educators working within universities is summarised in Maguire's (2000) use of Taylor's (1983) work. She characterises teacher education as a "Janus-faced" profession:

Teacher education is Janus-faced. In the one direction it faces classroom and school, with their demands for relevance, practicality, competence, technique. In

the other it faces the university and the world of research, with their stress on scholarship, theoretical fruitfulness and disciplinary rigour (Taylor, 1983, p. 4, as cited in Maguire, 2000, p. 151).

Throughout the literature on teacher educators' formation of their professional identities and practices, the complex and ambiguous roles lived out by teacher educators are evident. In negotiating the meanings of "practice" in our transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator we also found ourselves working between multiple institutional and practice 'locations', as well as competing understandings of practice and its relationship to our professional identities. We were once classroom teachers, but in the context of teacher education in a university setting, we were also 're-purposing' our knowledge and experiences in the formation of new professional identities. In our inquiry into the meaning of 'practice' for our developing identities as teacher educators, we also found the spatial metaphors of "third" spaces useful for making sense of the complexities of the work. In our case, we were not working directly with placement schools, however, our experience was that we were often contending with competing agendas and understandings of teacher education, most visibly in the *official stories* of practice in teacher education. We now turn to our study in more detail, outlining our positions and backgrounds, before moving on to consider the conceptual lens of *third space* and the narrative inquiry methodology we employed. After this, we present some of the narratives we wrote, shared and reflected upon as part of the process of our collaborative study. Lastly, we offer an analysis of these narratives for how they point up the issues around drawing upon one's practice as a teacher when making the transition to teacher education.

Study Participants and Institutional Context

The three authors worked as a teaching team in a sequence of two units in the English method, taught over the course of an academic year at a large (>5000 students) Faculty of Education at a research-intensive university in Melbourne, Australia. The units were taken by >80 students from a range of degree pathways and stages, and were designed to cater to those planning to teach subject English in secondary schools (students ages 12 – 18).

The situation we encountered and which prompted this study was unusual. Fleur was the unit coordinator for the English education units and had been working as a lecturer in teacher education for two years. Before transitioning to her full-time academic role, Fleur had worked as a co-teacher in the English education units for two years, while maintaining practice in a school part-time. Prior to her transition to teacher education, she had fourteen years' experience as an English teacher in independent schools in Melbourne. Stephanie was in her first year as a teaching associate while enrolled full time in a Doctoral degree, after five years as an English teacher at a Melbourne state school. Kristen was also in her first year of teacher education, working as a co-teacher while on leave from her position as a Head of English at an independent school in Melbourne. Kristen had also been teaching for fourteen years. The presence of Kristen in the team was an added dimension of our work together, as the Faculty had funded positions for currently practising teachers to work as 'embedded' practitioner-teacher educators within subject method units. Opportunities for dialogic collaborative inquiry were enhanced by Fleur having once occupied the role of Kristen (co-teacher), which meant that there were times when our shared reflections were informed by these different roles we had filled at different times. The composition of the team meant that Fleur, Kristen and Stephanie often team-taught the unit's workshops, while the planning and assessment were also conducted jointly, providing many opportunities for us to engage in

dialogue about our teaching practices and how we were transposing them to the context of teacher education.

Theoretical Framing: Conceptual Lens—*Third Space*

Third space became a way for us to frame and analyse the conditions of being early career teacher educators. Zeichner (2010) uses the concept of *third space* to elucidate some of the dilemmas of teacher education and to resist some of the ruling binaries that shape debates about the preparation of teachers. Of particular interest for our project was his noting that discussions of teacher education tend to reinscribe the “theory-practice” gap, sometimes in the course of valorising one side of this equation. By contrast, *third space* thinking involves “a rejection of binaries such as practitioner and academic knowledge and theory and practice” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 92). Viewing teacher education from the perspective of *third space* allows “the integration of what are often seen as competing discourses in new ways – an either/or perspective is transformed into a both/and point of view” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 92).

Third space allowed us to conceptualise what Soja (1996) calls “thirthing” – the subversion of binary categories by conceptualising a “third” that encompasses and exceeds the prior two terms. *Third space* gave us a language with which to situate ourselves at the intersection of competing understandings of education, schooling, and of the remit of teacher education. It was also a language we used to conceptualise the work we were engaged in to transform the professional knowledge of practice we had accrued through our own teacher education and years of classroom practice. In a process of “thirthing” we found ourselves working at the intersections of different ways of knowing. As we jointly reflected on our practice of teacher education, we observed that we were occupying a space between ‘the practical’ and the conceptual, between academic and applied knowledges, between that which was ‘general’ to teaching, and that which was situation and context-specific. We also found that our practice was at times aligned with understandings of teaching codified in the *official stories* such as professional standards, and at other times was resistant to or challenging the assumptions embedded in those stories. In this way, *third space* is analogous to Pratt’s (1991) concept of “the arts of the contact zone” which figure “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 34).

The idea of ‘working the third space’ conjured the sense of keeping different understandings of teaching in productive tension, as a site for inquiry and the development of a complex professional identity.

Methodology & Method: Collaborative Narrative Inquiry

For the purposes of our inquiry into reformulating our practice for teacher education, we engaged with narrative inquiry (Chase, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2012). With its emphasis on inquiring into, reflecting upon, and generating theory from lived experience, narrative inquiry suited our research into our own processes of becoming teacher educators. Narrative inquiry understands narrative to entail *a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one’s own or others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time.* (Chase, 2013, p. 56)

Our focus was on our experiences as we drew on our backgrounds as classroom teachers in the process of formulating a practice of teacher education. However, we also referred to aspects of our context that went beyond the individuals involved, to include the role of powerful discourses and practices that mediate our identities as teacher educators—the *official stories* and policy technologies of teacher education and teachers' work. As such, we were drawing on an understanding of experience as at least partially constituted by discourses and practices that characterise our professional landscape. This locates our narrative inquiry in “an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2012). As such, our narrative inquiry focussed on our negotiation with how practice is defined by discourses and practices of education reform, standards, and accreditation. There is little research on how recent accreditation requirements, as well as a reformist and interventionist “policy gaze” (White, 2019) on teacher education, are experienced by teacher educators themselves (Parr et al. 2019; Parr et al. 2020). Hence, our inquiry focussed on how we were constructing a pedagogy of teacher education while negotiating with these powerful policy understandings of teaching practice.

Throughout our year of teaching, we engaged in a collaborative, dialogic inquiry into how we were making sense of the experience of being early career teacher educators. This allowed us to co-construct understandings of the meanings we were deriving from our practice as teacher educators. In addition to weekly planning meetings, Fleur and Kristen also engaged in debriefing conversations after the English education workshops they team taught. The three of us also engaged in meetings devoted to exploring the tensions we were negotiating between the *official stories* of teacher education, and the situated understandings we were developing from reflection on our practice. After these meetings, each of us engaged in narrative writing, focusing on critical incidents from our practice as teacher educators; we then shared this writing with others in the group and used it as a focus for further discussion and analysis in subsequent meetings. As we recursively engaged in this process, it became clear that themes were emerging. Chief among the themes were: how we were struggling with the tension between showing and demonstrating practice to the pre-service teachers, and the need for the pre-service teachers to develop their own understandings of practice; our understandings of practice as involving critical reflection as well as content knowledge and the use of specific strategies; and feelings of being in a *third space* as we made the transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator. For the purposes of this paper, we have selected narratives from our writing that highlight the complexity of developing a practice of teacher education and becoming a teacher educator. In each of these narratives, we explore critical incidents in which we are working in a hybrid space that combines different understandings of our role – one as ‘transferring’ practice from experienced to novice teacher, and another as emphasising the need for teachers to formulate a critical and reflective practice of their own.

The Narratives

Walking the Tightrope of Modelling Practice – Fleur

Kristen and I had not been teaching long together, when a central dilemma of practice in teacher education became apparent. Kristen was at the front of the workshop group in our first class for the year. The focus of the workshop was lesson planning; we were introducing lesson planning by asking the pre-service teachers to plan for learning using a short text as a focus or prompt. In preparing for this workshop, we had assembled a set of short texts in a range of media: advertisements, short speeches, short animated films, art works, poetry. In collecting these resources, each member of the English education team had drawn upon what

she had used in classrooms herself and which had ‘worked’ on some level of classroom practice.

Kristen was presenting a ‘worked example’ of lesson planning using short texts, as a support for the pre-service teachers planning their own lesson. The context she gave the pre-service teachers was that her sample lesson was intended as an opening for a unit on War Poetry. The lesson modelled was to precede one on Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum est” and she explained that the Year 10 (15 years old) students for whom the lesson was planned would need to build up an understanding of the historical and cultural context of Owen’s work to appreciate the views and values he addressed in his poem. Handouts of the lesson plan itself, and the worksheet for the intended audience of Year 10 students, were shared with the pre-service teachers as Kristen walked them through the plan and her pedagogical thinking.

Later that afternoon, Kristen and I debriefed about the workshop over coffee. We both wanted to talk about the tensions around modelling practice through worked examples. Would the students derive any benefit from being taken through a worked example? We thought so – but we were uncertain if they understood the significance of Kristen’s having explained the context and background to her planning, as well as the thinking and deliberation involved. We wanted to make planning for learning explicit, but we also wanted to resist idea that teaching can be reduced to protocols and procedures that can be unproblematically replicated. Our concern was that Kristen’s worked example may be mistaken for a recipe, rather than a view into teacher thinking. We noted that teaching about teaching was a constant tightrope walk, having to inch along a narrow space – we wanted to draw on our classroom practice to inform our work with pre-service teachers, but we also wanted the pre-service teachers to draw on our practice as a resource for fashioning a practice of their own. As the light through the cafe window began to fade, we had begun the dialogic exploration of our practice as teacher educators and the complexities of developing a practice of teacher education.

Teacher or Teacher Educator? – Kristen

Late in the academic year, a discussion with a student following his professional experience placement highlighted for me what Williams (2013) describes as, “an uneasy sense of confused realities and questions – was I still a teacher, or am I now someone different as a teacher educator?” (2013, p. 120)

The discussion occurred in a workshop debriefing after the pre-service teachers had returned from placement. The student in question – Walt -- was feeling raw and vulnerable following negative feedback from his supervising teacher; she had been critical of his lack of professional growth during the period between placements. The supervising teacher had expected that Walt’s competence would have improved over the intervening time, but instead she felt he had regressed. The student’s response was that he, “Didn’t know what to do”.

Knowing the student, I was aware that he was particularly struggling with the curriculum planning aspects of teaching and the production of teacher-authored resources -- lesson planning and sequencing, the provision of learning activities, and the creation of worksheets. I could acutely imagine the frustration of that time-pressed teacher who was helping him in her classroom, and who may have felt he was not putting in the effort. In language adopted from current education policy, this student was not ‘classroom ready’.

Throughout the year, I found myself constantly evaluating situations, such as this one with Walt, from different vantage points. While moving forward into my new role as teacher educator, I was looking back on my old one as teacher. I felt myself moving between

empathising with the supervising teacher, and wondering what my role was as teacher educator, in potentially ‘saving’ this student from a disappointing experience. Perhaps he could have succeeded had I provided him with more resources and activities he could have applied to his classes? But as a teacher educator, the idea of transmitting professional ‘content’, without also providing some kind of critical framework, felt unethical. The idea that a student can be ‘saved’ by giving him ‘the templates’ devalues the complex, situated, and professional work of teaching and, in the long term, is unhelpful to the student’s learning and identity. While we had provided this support in the past, the professional placement was seen as the chance for the student to author their own materials and develop curriculum.

With Fleur and Stephanie, I found myself crossing back and forth between roles and spaces, continuously problematising what it is to ‘teach’, both as a teacher in schools, and as a new teacher educator. I found myself beginning to work between these seemingly oppositional positions, becoming comfortable with the idea that these tensions may, in fact, be essentially irresolvable.

Both Insider and Outsider – Stephanie

Less than one year out of the classroom, my time as a secondary teacher was still in my system. My identity still encompassed the English teacher part of me, my recollections still vivid and immediate. In my tutorials, these were the things my students valued the most. My storytelling, the time a student did this or that, would silence the class to solemn stillness. I fielded many, ‘What do I do if...?’ questions. In the room, I felt the desperate desire for *the answers*. And I remember being in that position too, when the job ahead of you demands complex and difficult things in so many ways, and you have only a short amount of time to gather solutions.

But, with the advice-giving and storytelling came a discomfort. I wondered if handing out this practical advice, even though my students sought it from me, stood outside the realm of my new type of work. If I fell into the ‘tips and tricks’ paradigm, I regretted not prefacing my own stories with how unique and inimitable each anecdote is.

With the story-sharing came another complication: I often found myself slipping between the identity of teacher and teacher educator in my tutorials, not feeling comfortable to adopt either term fully. I had only just begun my work as a PhD researcher, still a novice and still navigating the customs and cultures of academia, and at the same time, I had left the secondary classroom where I felt accomplished and experienced.

For a progress milestone presentation as part of my work as a PhD candidate, I declared my complex position as a teacher no longer in the classroom, and a novice researcher:

In my research, I occupy the uneasy space between the ‘insider’, with experience and knowledge as an educator in the secondary school setting, and the ‘outsider’, entering sites as an emerging researcher (Thomson & Gunter, 2011). In my writing and thinking processes, I inhabit both insider and outsider territories, often slipping subconsciously between they and we pronouns when conceptualising teachers’ work.

This inner conflict failed to reach a resolution for me. And maybe it never can, nor should it. Perhaps a teacher educator can never fully occupy both spaces. The teacher portion of ourselves remains firmly in place, and it is this part of ourselves that informs the work we do in teacher education.

I am both a teacher *and* a teacher educator.

Discussion

Each of these narratives explores the tensions we navigated as we, in various ways, drew upon our knowledge as classroom teachers to inform our work with prospective teachers. Furthermore, it is apparent in the narratives that each of the authors found themselves working at a boundary between the expectation that “teaching about teaching” involves the provision of training in specific strategies and techniques, the ‘passing on’ of practice from expert to novice, and the acknowledgement that ‘good teaching’ goes beyond knowing the technicalities of the profession. That teacher education involves negotiating “tensions” (Berry, 2007, 2008) may be a perennial aspect of the role. The literature on the professional identities and practices of teacher educators highlights the complex identities of teacher educators, charged with working in a ‘third space’ between competing understandings of practice. A more recent development is the intensification of policy and political-media focus on teacher education and teaching in Australia, the UK and the USA (Maguire, 2014; Mayer, 2014; Rowe & Skourdoumbis, 2019; Zeichner, 2014). This means that *official stories* of teacher professionalism increasingly mediate the practice of teacher education (Bourke, 2019). Framing our experiences as mapping out a ‘third space’ allowed us to resist collapsing our practice into either the mere application of ‘the practical’ or a disavowal of the practical dimensions of learning how to teach.

The challenge was to “teach about teaching” in ways that made explicit some of the demands of the profession, and the professional knowledge and skills involved in being a teacher, while also resisting policy narratives that reduce teaching to a technical accomplishment. As each of us engaged in reformulating her practice for the purposes of preparing prospective teachers, we were confronted with the need to work in a third space between different understandings of teaching. In the first narrative, Fleur and Kristen work within what might be seen as a dominant paradigm of teacher education, insofar as Kristen is presenting a worked example of planning for learning, and speaking directly from her position as a Head of English in a local school. We felt that such ‘practitioner perspectives’ were valuable for pre-service teachers and we endeavoured throughout the year to bring in artefacts of practice, such as classroom teaching materials and engaging learning activities, to support the pre-service teachers in connecting principles of teaching with examples from practice. However, we were also aware of how difficult it is to communicate teachers’ deliberative decision making outside the context in which such pedagogical reasoning occurs. In our post-workshop debriefings, we often noted the solemn silence that greeted Kristen’s narratives of her practice ‘from the field’. This phenomenon was also noticed by Stephanie, as she related anecdotes from her recent work with school students. We were unsure how to interpret the intensity with which the pre-service teachers attended to ‘stories from the field’. We were sympathetic to the pre-service teachers’ desire for models and answers as final professional experience placements and graduation approached; however, we also wanted to convey the complexity of teaching, and that in the end, teaching practice is something that must be fashioned by the teacher themselves, rather than something that can be transferred, from one practitioner to another, as a finished product. We were resisting a prevailing narrative, incentivized by discourses of ‘classroom ready’, that graduate teachers see themselves as equipped with content and techniques that can be mechanically applied to all learning situations. Zeichner (2012) notes this tension in the renewed focus on ‘practice-based’ teacher education, cautioning that:

[O]ne danger we have to watch out for is the use of artifacts of teaching as scripts that undermine teachers’ abilities to exercise their judgment and to adapt instruction to meet the constantly changing needs of students and the different contexts of their work. (p. 379)

Seeing our practice as ‘working the third space’ allowed us to accommodate the pre-service teachers’ need for explicit instruction in elements of practice such as planning for learning or assessment, while also acknowledging that teaching practice is not simply a package of knowledge and skills that can be ‘delivered’ to novice practitioners. The language of ‘third space’ gave us a conceptual framework for inquiring into how understandings of critical and reflective professionalism informed our practice as well as helping students meet the more performative criteria for initial registration as teachers.

Stephanie’s and Kristen’s narratives address more directly another dimension of our ‘working the third space’ as a process of identity work. Research on the formation of teacher educator identity has highlighted the complexity of drawing on a prior identity as a classroom teacher while constructing a new identity as a teacher educator in higher education. Kristen’s ambivalence in response to Walt’s story of his disappointing professional placement experience highlights the complex positions held by teacher educators. The teacher educator may identify with the situation of supervising teachers in schools, even while they also enact a different role as a source of support for novice teachers outside of the school context (Williams, 2013). She is also contending with *official stories* of her expected role here -- policy recommendations imply that those with recent classroom practice experience are best placed to ‘deliver’ a practice-oriented teacher education. These policy narratives suggest that with enough coaching in the technical aspects of teaching, Walt might have been saved from his painful experience. While she sympathises with Walt’s “raw” and “vulnerable” confession, Kristen also acknowledges that the view of practice as something that can be unproblematically supplied to another is flawed. Meanwhile, Stephanie struggles with turbulence in her identity as a teacher and teacher educator. Even while the identity of classroom teacher is still in her “system” and a source of valuable professional knowledge, there is also the task of constructing an identity as a researcher, someone who now studies teachers rather than working among them. This, too, is a *third space* ambivalence that must be worked with indefinitely.

Conclusion

Our collaborative narrative inquiry focused on how we drew upon and reconstituted our practice as classroom teachers as we made the transition to new roles as teacher educators. During this transition, we also negotiated with prevailing policy and political-media narratives about teacher professionalism and the preparation of teachers. In so doing, we drew upon Malcolm and Zukas’s (2009) research on *official stories* of work to highlight how our process of constructing identities as teacher educators occurred in a context in which technicist understandings of teaching are predominant. Throughout our inquiry we focussed on the ways in which we were in alignment with or resistant to the *official stories* of teacher education. While Murray and Males’ (2005) concept of teacher educators as “second order professionals” connotes a degree of reflexivity about practice, current policy narratives risk positioning teacher educators as ‘second order technicians’, tasked with the ‘transfer’ of practice as a reified set of content and skills. In the vision of teacher education in which teacher educators “deliver” practice to pre-service teachers, both are positioned as subject to a ruling discourse, rather than as authors of a practice that has intellectual and ethical commitments. Given the rapidly changing global environment, we need graduate teachers who are prepared to do more than replicate existing practices, but who can also fashion a responsive and situated practice of their own. While we found that we consistently used our knowledge of classroom practice in our work as teacher educators, we also encountered the limitations of a transmission understanding of teacher education; we could offer models,

examples of practice and support, but our role was also, crucially, providing structured opportunities for novice teachers to formulate their own (emerging) practice and to be prepared to refine their practice in response to the needs of particular students and contexts.

‘Working the third space’ became a way of conceptualising the in-between position of combining ‘practical’ and theoretical dimensions of teaching in a perpetual process of “thirthing” as we formulated a pedagogy of teacher education. It also supplied a way of reflecting on the complex and multiple identities we formed as teacher educators – as professionals who had backgrounds in classroom experience, but who were now involved in preparing teachers and pursuing research agendas. Storying and re-storying the *third space* we worked in was a way of speaking back to reductive narratives of what it means to teach and prepare teachers. It created conditions for other, more agentic narratives to take shape. The implications are that purposefully inquiring into working in this complex space can become an important strategy in the professional formation of teacher educators as critically engaged professionals.

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