Teacher Educator, Go Measure Thyself: Self-Reflection and Judgement of the Teachers of Teachers

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Abstract
In offering a reflection on my original 2008 study, “Teacher educator, go educate thyself: who teaches the teachers of teachers? Establishing a Model of Professional Formation for Teacher Educators in Further Education Colleges, I offer a reflection on dialogue held with educators of teachers in the UK, Canada, Holland, Australia and the USA. This process has led to insights into how they view the existence of Standards for Teacher Educators (or their absence) in relation to identifying appropriate opportunities for continuing personal and professional development. In particular, this reflective study considers how to maintain and continue to develop professional skills and knowledge.

Key words: teacher education, reflection, continuous professional development, self-study, professional standards.

Introduction

I have been a teacher educator for many years. I originally trained to train others. I began to practice my craft by echoing the use of the “telling, guiding and correcting” approach to skills and knowledge development as advocated by my (then) mentor. I observed this approach used in practice by my peers and it is, perhaps, so familiar to many. This is a methodology that I feel I have fought hard and successfully to move away from during my journey as teacher of teachers. I believe I now model, as well as advocate, an alternative approach. I was able to measure my own development against standards, being guided towards an appropriate degree of skill, knowledge and understanding, listed as competencies developed and accredited by what was then the Training and Development Lead Body. Reflecting back on this period of my personal history, I realise that there was, to some extent, an acknowledgement of the varying roles performed within training. As I moved out of the commercial sector and into education, any clarity over performance standards, such as it was, became blurred and eventually irrelevant.

The words of a student from 2008 were the catalyst for my own reflexive action research. I began questioning my understanding of the standards I work to as a teacher educator: “Surely, they can’t be the same, can they?” If I am educating others to teach, who assesses my ability in the role? These words remain the key motivator, giving the drive and impetus for further reflection and analysis of personal professional practice in teacher education.
Combining a broad set of national standards would, I believe, give an opportunity to differentiate by role and by responsibility, in order to award credit to those who trained trainers. If standards for teachers exist but not for teachers of teachers, how should a teacher educator judge their performance?

I place considerable personal stress on developing understanding through reflection that effective teaching demands and which appears so often in definitions of teaching as a profession. For example, in England, the General Teaching Council (2002) regarded professional teachers as “those who continually reflect on their own practice, improve their practice and deepen their knowledge”. The UK Education and Training Foundation (2014) clearly sees that:

Teachers and trainers are reflective and enquiring practitioners who think critically about their own educational assumptions, values and practice in the context of a changing contemporary and educational world, drawing on relevant research as part of evidence-based practice (p7)

In the United States, the National Board for Teaching Standards (2002) define a teacher as one who can:

- analyse classroom interactions, student work products, their own actions and plans in order to reflect on their practice and continually renew and reconstruct their goals and strategies (Clarke & Erikson 2004).

The same source cites Brock’s discussion paper for the Australian College of Educators:

- it is incumbent on members of the teaching profession to be “reflective practitioners, committed to their own professional development: seeking to deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgement, expand their teaching repertoire, and to adapt their teaching to educationally sound developments arising from authentic research and scholarship (2000, p11)

It becomes apparent from such readings that reflection is seen as a skill attributed to the learning professional, a crucial element in the professional growth of teachers (Zeichner 1992, Calderhead and Gates 1993). As such, the emphasis is placed upon the use, the application, of the knowledge that emerges from time and energy allocated to reflective activities. It is also crucial that if any reflection is to have value it must be effective.

I began to base my daily reflections on interactions with pre-service (full time) and in-service (part time) trainee teachers at a large College of Further and Higher Education. These were considered over a three-month period (following a recent move away from the awarding of pass/fail to a graded assessment process). I adopted the “critical incident technique” (Flanagan 1954, Woolsey 1986). During that period, I felt it essential that I made my pedagogical decisions and underlying justifications explicit to my students, in class, in tutorial, in feedback following observation of work-based practice and when formally marking coursework. I also took the opportunity to do so in more informal moments, such as in break times and frequent “corridor conversations”. When I moved on to undertake a similar role in a University setting where grading was well-established, I saw a need to justify my position as a leader of learning for my students. I felt I needed to “credentialise” myself in their eyes. I chose to do so by making my pedagogical decisions and underlying justifications explicit to my students.
Reflecting on this today has led me to accept that this may have served more of a need within me than for my students.

**Why self-study?**

Self-study *is research* (Lewison 2003, Clarke & Erickson 2004). It offers a methodology characterised by examining the role of the self in research projects and "the space between self and the practice engaged in" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15 cited in Kitchen 2006). Self-study, writes Lewison (2003) is:

> a generally agreed set of insider research practices that promote teachers taking a close, critical look at their teaching and the academic and social development of their students.

Lewison adds clarity and guidance, suggesting that self-study:

> involves classroom teachers in a cycle of inquiry, reflection and action...teachers question common practice, approach problems from new perspectives, consider research and evidence to propose new solutions, implement these solutions and evaluate the results, starting the cycle anew (p100)

Such “self-study”, maintains Kitchen (2006), enables teacher educators to focus on their own teaching and on their students' learning while engaging in scholarly practice. It allows for the:

> analysis of one’s own practice with all the attendant challenges and celebrations associated with such scrutiny (Clarke & Erickson 2004).

It is particularly resonant that any perceived outcomes of self-study (referred to by Swennen et al (2008) as narrative-biographical research) are seen as teacher knowing - where one’s practice is always evolving, rather than teacher knowledge - where one’s practice is pretty much fixed or static. (Clarke & Erickson 2004). Teaching is a journey. “It is better to travel well than arrive” (Buddha)

**What do the standards provide?**

Analysis of existing standards for teacher educators, where they exist, (American Association of Teacher Educators, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Association of Teacher Education Europe, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, Ontario College of Teachers) and a wider reading (Education International) and position papers (Snoek & van der Sanden 2005) reveals varying conceptions of how to measure professionalism in this context. Categories such as pedagogy, scholarship, programme development, advocacy, cultural competence, collaboration are considered, with particular emphasis being placed upon reflection. Understanding obtained from these findings have served to guide my own practice as a teacher educator, giving a focus to reflections upon my lived experienced in the role. This is no different, I observe, to the process that my learners are encouraged to engage with during their programme of study. Indeed, it is my opinion that if reflection *contributes* to the overall success of a trainee teacher and where critical incident analysis *is* used (for example, peer analysis of on-line contributions made to forums (or Wikis) as formative assessment mechanisms) so as to build evidence required for a
summative portfolio, there is an ethical issue raised. How can teacher educators demand reflection of novice teachers if those they look to as models of professionalism, such as ourselves, are not (or appear to others not to be) prepared to engage in the same? Here, therefore, I feel compelled to evaluate my own practice as lived experience.

There is an inherent danger in that any reflective undertaking may, by its very nature, become insular and private (Cochrane-Smyth & Lytle 1993 cited in Clarke & Erickson 2004). Self-studies are carried out in what Schön (1987) refers to eloquently as “indeterminate, swampy zones of practice” (p3). Much of the literature regarding self-study intimates that sharing and communicating knowledge and practices is the key to maximise learning, and that the support of colleagues engaged similarly supports ongoing, critical engagement with the challenges and issues investigations such as these present (Loughran, Mitchell & Mitchell 2002, cited in Clarke & Erickson 2004). I feel it essential that whilst I deliberate on experiences in class, subsequent written reflections are able to be shared as part of discussions with colleagues. I continue to benefit enormously from regular, often protracted “learning conversations” (Laurillard 2002) with colleagues. Indeed, typically but not exclusively, these are generated by or connected to pedagogical deliberations and issue-resolution, where teacher educators and their learner, ultimately, both find equal benefit.

(Journal extract)
This afternoon I sat down with ..... as we both realised that there was something “lacking” in the session we had delivered together. I bought us coffees. She suggested and I agreed that there needed to be something a bit more dynamic in the way we deliver theory to our trainees. Talking about this in the light of my Masters research was reassuring, also really helpful to get some context to what I had been reading. I was unsure how effectively we were conveying some elements. She wasn’t sure. We shared some ideas and some suggestions but what was clear to me, to us both if I am honest, was to work on a more dynamic team-teaching delivery approach – providing a discourse between us that might engage the learners more. We felt we might enjoy it all a bit more ourselves as a result.
(We) also discussed how we might use more frequent seminar-based approaches and wondered whether learners would respond to this. I must ask her about her ideas on this next time we can talk.

Fullan (1993) shares a concern that resonates here. All too often, he suggests, teachers become so preoccupied with pupil learning that they neglect their own.

Prior to removal to Bolton, I benefitted from sharing peer commentary and critique with one colleague in particular: a less experienced yet skilled, highly reflective developing teacher educator who became one-half of the core delivery team with me. I brought to our shared working my experience of teaching on a model of (full time) pre-service provision that had been consolidated. It had reduced from three taught days, to two, then to one extended day: this in order to meet managerial demands for expediency and to make more time available for trainee teachers to engage in work-based activity. My colleague was able to reflect on her having been a student on the previous programme when collaborating on programme design and module delivery.
Interesting comment today from ... Listening to learners feeding back on an activity about learning strategies and planning, she told me that she still thinks theory is taught in a bubble, a vacuum, that we need to move towards modelling what she feels would work better – delivery based on a range of theory (theories?) and then highlighting this to the learners.

We were now required to come together so as to team-teach one day per week. This proved an ideal opportunity for self-study.

Our “reflexive inquiry” (Knowles & Cole 1994) involved a broad spread of activity, from unfocussed discussion responsive to experience or need:

(Extract from notes made following my attending a live conference and engaging in a synchronous discussion session with students who were in class via our Virtual Learning Environment)

So what went well? Engaging the learners in a conference that they could not be at in person. We were able to make connections between learning in a module called “Contemporary Issues and Professional Impact” and the contemporary issues raised at the conference. We need to remember how keen the learners were to ask questions using the live forum we had set up. We really need to be sure that there is a way to signal when an appropriate time is coming up for the students to ask questions. The delivery of the content in class needs to relate as closely as possible to the live feed and make it relevant. Make it “fit”.

as well as notes on regular collaborative teaching experiences (for example, was the structure of the day working out, was our instinctive “tag team” approach to co-tutoring working or did we need to have more structure to these sections).

We would make comparisons of written feedback on decision-making provided during formalised joint lesson observations. We engaged in dialogue via e-mail and text:

Email - Subject: assignment feedback

What was done well: The report – good evidence of reflection and evaluation in most cases Micro-teaches and documentation – but note that for observations rationales should be much more specific to the individual lesson and group and less generic The essays where there were good connections between the behaviour, the theory to support it and examples from practice. Things to avoid: Over-reliance on class notes and activities – for example the four classifications of behaviour we identified in class are not ‘generally accepted as the four main classifications’. Referencing - for example, if you write about a theory, unless you have read about it in the primary source, you should cite the date that the main theory was published and then give your source of information An academic style is not demonstrated by overly formal language and convoluted sentence structure Apostrophe abuse is still endemic Unsupported assertions - if you are putting forward your own ideas there are two ways in which you provide evidence to support them: include a reference to another academic source which supports or has influenced your ideas or provide an example from your own experience. Using academic papers that are on that fit the general topic but that refer to quite different areas without making a justification for the relevance of their general or specific point.

Other extracts include:
Thank you. My plan was for them to research a current strategy for teaching a particular … concept and then to do ten minutes demonstrating it the following week in a sort of micro-micro teach. I wasn't going to tackle the qualifications until after Easter. I hope that is ok and doesn't throw you out with your planning?

Still enjoyed the day though. Hope today is sorted and that yesterday went well. Forgot to say that I suspect that because of the timetabling we will have to break for lunch at a different time to avoid room clashes. Can you have another look at the timetable? Thanks

Snap, great minds. Thank you keep sending --- I have also attached a lesson plan, just 'cos it is the easiest way for me to tell you what I am planning to do

That would be good. Sounds sensible, I will take the same approach.

and the analysis of commentary found in learners’ reflective journals and course work.

Our notes show that we gained much from this “collaborative autobiography” (Butt et al, 1992) but that we began to disagree on the need to have a clear set of professional standards, ranging, as in the case of the ATE, from pedagogy and cultural competence to scholarship, professional development, collaboration and advocacy, against which to benchmark: she as a newcomer and myself as an “old-timer” (Lave & Wenger 1991). I felt then and still do feel, that to have had access to agreed standards for teacher educators at any stage of their career as a reference for peer evaluation can only be of enormous benefit, if only in terms of focus for discussion and deliberation. It would now be logical for to collaborate in the production and presentation of papers and sharing our findings in collaborative research meetings. It will be interesting to see if this is possible, given that we now work in different organisations, with differing demands upon our time and skills.

A key question emerges.

In what way does the approach to issues of design, delivery and evaluation of teaching and learning I advocate as a teacher educator, which is professed, match with my own practice in any way, appearing closely compatible with that which I actually engage in myself? “Is what I believe to be how I act borne out in reality?”. Any dissonance between beliefs and practice is seen as being “fundamental to action” (Loughran & Northfield 1998) Studying one’s teaching practices results in a constant reframing (a la Schön) of an understanding of the self and one’s practice: to see if indeed we “practice what we preach” (Knowles and Cole 1994) There is a need I feel, therefore, as someone who defines himself as “a teacher who teaches teachers” (see also the work of Russell (1997) on this point), to look at myself and my own research with a view to examine their impact on personal professional development.

Practical inquiry may be foundational to formal research that will be truly useful in improving practice” (Richardson 1994).

One source that informs my own self-study (Hamilton & Pinnegar 1998) offers that:
a teacher educator must be open to ideas from other teacher educators, from other disciplines and from students themselves in order to help students develop their teaching potential

adding that:

\textit{such a teacher educator must be willing to risk collaborating with the student, who will become a teacher, and other colleagues interested in the education of teachers”} (Hamilton & Pinnegar 1998).

This is what I aim to do.

**What has this approach taught or offered to me?**

Through self-study, I have become aware of engaging increasingly in a profound re-conceptualisation: of role; responsibilities and approach, for:

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  - self study of teacher educator practices is a formalisation of reframing. Those involved in self-study systematically collect evidence of their practice, allowing them to rethink and potentially open themselves to new interpretations and to create different strategies for educating students that bring their practices into concert with the moral values they espouse” (Hamilton & Pinnegar 1998).

who cite the contention of Cole & Knowles that there is a “general dismissal by academic communities of both qualitative research and a commitment to good teaching”. I contend that this misses the point entirely: qualitative research serves to underpin the best teaching.

Teacher educators, it is offered, should:

- confront, re-examine and possibly reinterpret their past experiences in the light of new experiences” (Lomax, Evans & Parker, 1998), “pushing” for “closer scrutiny of an individual’s pedagogy in teaching about teaching” (Loughran & Northfield 1998).

The very activity of writing reflexively on the theme of studying personal pedagogical practice has induced further periods of analysis, of justification for choices I have made and the wording of explanations I have offered to peers and, especially, to my students. This has also led to inevitable periods of doubt and anxiety.

(Extract)

I thought the activity would have been much better received than it was. I have done exactly the same thing before, in the same way, with a similar size of group. They were not that much different in terms of age or experience. Maybe I didn’t introduce it well enough? Did I confuse them all or some of them? I just feel that the time spent creating the resources that I have printed out and tried to use as I had planned for them was wasted. It could all have been put on the VLE for them to read through, I guess. I don’t know now. I know I should ask them directly. I will. I am not sure I will be overly happy with their feedback, though.

(Extract)

I wanted them to appreciate the planning process a bit more. I launched into an explanation of what I had decided to do at that moment in their lesson and then continued by what probably came across as a lot of philosophical wrangling over the pedagogical choices I made. Maybe I spend too much time working it out. All
this aiming to meet their needs, as a group and as individuals…. When they spoke
to me, asking me why I “felt the need to explain all the time”; I was really quite
taken aback. I thought it was obvious. I thought it would be of benefit to them.
Them as learners. Them as developing practitioners. I feel now as I did at the time
that it’s important to understand the choice(s) a tutor makes. Surely, it has to be? I
will still do this. I often learn so much from the responses I get. The measured
responses in particular. What happened this time just makes me a little more
reticent, more reluctant to expose myself in this way. Perhaps it will pass. I will
make the effort to discuss this with my colleagues as I can’t be alone in doing this,
can I? Maybe I should offer to explain only if they ask?

As a result of adopting the self-study approach, I found the narrative aspects of writing
the action research report to be equally as empowering as others have found (Bullock
correspond to what someone says they do, or would do, in a situation, whilst “theories-
in-use” correspond to what they actually do. (Argyris and Schön, 1974). “Teacher
education is the easiest domain of teaching in which to experience self as a “living
contradiction”’ suggests Whitehead (1993) arguing that there is a “need to understand
and recognise that ideas and aspirations may not be matched by teaching practices”.
I found when completing my Masters dissertation that asking students to judge this aspect
on one’s behalf can be a salutary experience. Here, with the benefit of hindsight,
collaborating in self-study would have proven particularly effective: an opportunity to
perform personal professional practice missed.

In attempting to answer the question of how a teacher educator gains and constructs
knowledge, the work of Sfard (1998) encourages a focus on her “twin Metaphors of
learning”: engaging in reading and research would clearly align with her “Metaphor of
acquisition”, where (she offers) the intention is cognitive growth by receiving, I have
also found that the “Metaphor of participation” is relevant to my own experience,
where learning comes from active involvement in an ongoing engagement as a
legitimate peripheral participant (Lave and Wenger 1991) in a defined community of
practice, situated in a particular context and culture.

In a particularly valuable work, Swennen et al. (2008) recommend that:

Teacher educators need to have more than theoretical knowledge and skills at their
disposal, as well as the ability to link this expertise to their own practices and the
practices of their student teachers: they need to learn the professional language, not
only to enhance the level of congruent teaching, but also in order to learn from the
expertise of colleagues, to reflect on their own teaching and to develop as teacher
educators. (2008, p. 541)

Collaboration allowed for a clearer understanding of the need for a balanced approach
to using both Metaphors equally. Now, I am seeking opportunities to collaborate further
in this respect. It continues to prove particularly valuable to reflect on each metaphor’s
relevance as well as their combined value.

Organisational provision of opportunities should exist to participate in and reflect upon
in terms of relevant learning activities promoting systematic reflection of personal
practice and learning. What, therefore, is to be the role of professional associations (VELON, ATEE, AATE, ETF, HEA) in offering well-defined CPD and how central will self-study come to this as the most effective model of reflection?

Conclusions

Adopting a self-study approach to researching teacher education has allowed me an opportunity for a reflective re-viewing of the work of Csikszentmihalyi who suggests a theory of Flow (1990), described as “a full, masterful control over events, attuned to task at hand” (Smith 1998, see also Jackson & Smith 1996, McMahon 2005, 2011). I realise that for me, as a practitioner of teacher education, a direct result of self-study raises a fundamental question to be answered: one that I have yet to clearly answer for myself. Do teachers who experience “flow” as it is defined above, effectively engage in self-study? Is there value in the deliberate attempt to take oneself out of any possible “flow” state, stopping any such activity in order to engage in self-study in collaboration with others? I would argue that it is more effective to use video recording or the notes and perspectives of peers and participants to successfully inform the reflective, reflexive process. My students have the benefit of engaging in micro-teaching and, later, the possibility of filming two teaching sessions for sharing with their tutors. I have neither learning tools as a “given” aspect of my ongoing professional development. Teacher educators would clearly benefit from opportunities to deliver in a classroom provided with recording facilities that they can control themselves, obtaining recorded footage of their practice (theory in use) for playback analysis in their own time and to share with whom they wish, when they wish. Here, too, I argue that to have a set of standards to self-evaluate against is essential and that these, by necessity, cannot be the same as those used by teacher educators to evaluate the developing performance of their own student teachers.

I am fortunate that I am now able to contribute to, as well as benefit from, a collaborative peer observation process designed to focus upon practitioner learning from practitioner. This is seen as a learning conversation, where agreement is sought in advance on what the observee feels will be useful to colleagues, followed by identifying collaboratively the good practice arising that should be passed on.

This self-study approach to active practitioner research has discussed how teacher educators may engage in more purposeful professional development through self-reflection and draw on “the authority of experience” (Munby & Russell 1994) by reference to such standards, focusing on clearly-stated professional learning goals. Findings related to the means by which established teacher educators maintain a philosophy of teaching and learning have been considered. If practice is continuously reviewed on any deepening understanding obtained by consideration of published standards, how does this inform research and one’s own practice? Such standards should not have to be sought out but made explicit to any who begin the teacher educator journey.
My own reflexive action research led me to adopt self-study: an approach that is becoming an increasingly profound learning experience for me. I am someone who defines myself professionally by the role of teacher educator. The catalyst was a student from 2008, questioning my understanding of the standards I work to as a teacher educator who is educating others to teach – “Surely, they can’t be the same, can they?” This posed that key question, therefore, by default: who assesses my ability in the role? This remains the key motivator, giving me the drive and impetus for further reflection and analysis of personal professional practice in teacher education.

The result of my self-study has, I feel, implications for teacher education in that I recommend the establishment of professional standards for both emerging and established teacher educators working in the UK Lifelong Learning Sector. I believe that to have it clearly expressed that one of an agreed set of standards for teacher educators emphasises reflection linking experience to theory (see Sfard 1998), as with the American Association of Teacher Educators Standards, can only serve to benefit students and teacher educators in equal measure. Standard 4 (Professional Development) from a set of 9 Standards associated with “Accomplished Teacher Educators” reads:

Accomplished teacher educators help pre-service and in-service teachers with professional development and reflection, and model examples from their personal development, making transparent the goals, information, and changes for improvements in their own teaching. Teacher educators examine their own beliefs and contributions of life experiences. (AATE 2015 online, p4)

The same source offers clear guidance on what indicates best practice, where teacher educators systematically reflect on own practice and learning, engage in purposeful professional development focused on professional learning goals, develop and maintain a philosophy of teaching and learning that is continuously reviewed based on a deepening understanding of research and practice, participate in and reflect on learning activities in professional associations and learned societies and apply life experiences to teaching and learning. (ATE 2015 p4)

For how long is it to remain the case where teachers of teachers in the United Kingdom are judging the performance of their students by way of clearly defined standards (ETF 2014) yet, by and large, remain self-taught, self-regulating and self-critical: teacher educator, go judge thyself?

References


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