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Title: Teacher educators and ‘accidental’ careers in academe: an Australian perspective

Journal: Journal of Education for Teaching ISSN: 0260-7476 1360-0540
Year: 2011 Volume: 37 Issue: 3 Pages: 247-260

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DOIs: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2011.588011
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02607476.2011.588011#preview


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Teacher educators and ‘accidental’ careers in academe: 
an Australian perspective

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While teacher education is often seen as the key to preparing qualified teachers who are able to educate students for the demands of the twenty-first century, relatively little attention is paid to the teacher educators who actually do this work. Given the increased demand for teacher educators in Australia due to retirements, and the changing political and institutional context of teacher education, it is timely to understand a little more about the teacher educator workforce. Who are they, why do they work in teacher education, what career pathways have led them to teacher education, what are key aspects of their knowledge and practice as teacher educators, and what are the critical issues faced by those working in teacher education? This paper reports on a study that investigated the pathways into teacher education and the career trajectories of a small group of teacher educators working in a range of university sites in three states in Australia. The study draws on interview data to examine the ways in which these teacher educators talk about the accidental nature of their career pathways, their views about teaching and research, and the variable ways in which experiential and research knowledge are recognised and valued within the field of teacher education and in the academy. The report highlights important considerations for the preparation of the next generation of teacher educators as well as for their induction, mentoring and career planning in order to build and sustain a viable teacher education workforce for the twenty-first century.

Keywords: teacher educator; teacher educator career pathway; teacher educator knowledge base

Introduction

Literature about the nature of teacher educators’ career trajectories and pathways is relatively rare within the field of teacher education research in general, and specifically in Australia. A great deal of teacher education research has focused on teacher standards and competencies, professional experience and professionalism, and transitions to teaching. Of the 215 articles considered in a review of research pertaining to teacher education (Murray, Nuttall, and Mitchell 2008), only eight were concerned with the background, knowledge and attitudes of teacher educators, including both university and school-based teacher educators. Teacher educators are ‘a unique – but often overlooked or devalued – professional group with distinctive knowledge bases, pedagogical expertise, engagement in scholarship and/or research, and deep rooted social, moral and professional responsibilities to schooling’ (Murray, Swennen, and Shagrir 2008, 41). However, it is only very recently that the field has produced a small, but growing body of literature concerned specifically with the work of teacher educators and the need to understand their pathways into teacher education, their work experiences, and their aspirations and career trajectories. Such interest is derived from acknowledgement that in similar ways to how teachers and teacher quality affect school students’ educational success, teacher educators are increasingly being seen as key to the successful preparation of future generations of teachers. In addition, increasing concern about the ageing nature of the teacher educator workforce and the need for renewal has prompted research into the nature of the work of teacher educators and their professional identities. It is predicted that in the next few years in Australia there will be a shortage of academics in all disciplines (Hugo 2008). ‘[T]here is a clear, present and growing demand for academic work, a demand being propelled by system growth, looming retirements and increased international mobility’ (Coates et al. 2009, 2). The predicted shortage of academics is particularly worrying given the Australian Government target of 40% of those in the 25–34-year-old age group to have a bachelor’s degree or above by 2025 [Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2009]. Within universities, faculties and schools of education are potentially under great staffing stress, with 62.8% of the teacher education workforce currently over 50 years of age (Hugo 2008) and...
therefore eligible to retire within the next 5–10 years (see also Australian Council of Deans of Education 2009). In order to replenish and renew the teacher education workforce in Australia, it is important to understand who teacher educators are, what attracts them to teacher education, and what facilitates their career development and satisfaction. This study set out to address these questions.

This paper reports on a study investigating the career pathways and work experiences of teacher educators in Australia, highlighting why and how they became teacher educators; how they negotiate(d) academe, how they think of their work and themselves as teachers and researchers, and the variable ways in which their teaching experience and research knowledge are recognised and valued within academe. The paper provides an overview of past and present contexts of teacher education in Australia, outlines the study and methodology, and discusses two key themes that emerged from analysis of the data: (1) the entry of the participants into teacher education was often by accident rather than design; and (2) the participants held contested views of the knowledge required of teacher educators and the means by which that is gained. Recommendations are made for the preparation of the next generation of teacher educators and the induction, support, mentoring and structured career pathways that will be necessary to sustain their work in the increasingly politicised and performance-based culture of higher education in Australia.

The context of teacher educators’ work in Australia

Significant contextual shifts have shaped the patterns of teacher education in Australia over the last 50 years (for details see Polesel and Teese 1998). These shifts have in turn influenced the career pathways and work of teacher educators. Teacher education in Australia in the early 1960s was predominantly located in teachers' colleges controlled by state-based departments of education. Changes to the policies governing professional and technical education in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the development of teacher preparation institutions independent of state departments of education and a new sector of professional higher education known as ‘colleges of advanced education’. This shift reflected a concern to improve the quality and professional standing of teaching qualifications. More broadly, it reflected a concern to develop national systems of professional and vocational education that modelled some of the structures of universities, attracted well-qualified teaching staff and offered degree-level courses. That said, there was a clear delineation made between these colleges and universities. Universities had a role in generating knowledge through research while colleges had a much stronger professional and vocational orientation. Thus, through the 1970s and 1980s the bulk of teacher education took place in colleges of advanced education, with a small number of universities offering postgraduate programmes in secondary teacher education. During this time the qualifications expected of a teacher educator were typically at least a degree higher than that required by teachers, and/or outstanding teaching credentials.

The late 1980s marked another major shift, with the development of a unified system of higher education in Australia. The two-tiered college and university system became one. Through various processes of college amalgamation, mergers with existing universities and individual institutional change, a new and revised set of universities was established. This meant that all teacher education programmes were located within universities and led to considerable change in work orientation for those in the new university-based faculties and schools of education. As might be expected, these new universities also had responsibility for research and knowledge production alongside professional preparation of teachers. This had major implications for teacher educators in that they were now expected to have higher degree qualifications and engage in research alongside teaching. In the Australian higher education system it is increasingly difficult to gain a full-time, continuing academic position without a doctoral degree, and such a qualification is often expected for an entry-level lecturer academic position. Those employed in the Australian higher education system are promoted through tiered academic levels of appointment from lecturer to senior lecturer, associate professor and finally professor. Promotion is generally based on performance in three areas of academic work – research, teaching and service – although increasingly there is greater opportunity for staff to be promoted based on either research or teaching accomplishments.
Australia is currently in the midst of a national policy push that aims to improve teacher quality, and acknowledge the role of teacher education in providing high-quality beginning teachers. However, as in the case of many so-called developed countries, teacher education is being positioned as a 'policy problem' (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2005). The 'Smarter Schools – Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership' (TQN) programme aims to develop and implement initiatives to attract, prepare, place, develop and retain quality teachers and school leaders in schools. This includes a push for nationalised and standardised professional standards for teachers, national accreditation of teacher education programmes and national registration of teachers, along with generously funded 'alternative pathways' into teaching, such as 'Teach for Australia', which implicitly question the value of teacher education as it has traditionally been delivered.

Another major consideration in Australian higher education is the perceived value of teacher education research and the research that teacher educators conduct and publish. Within the current political context, the value of teacher education research is being questioned. In Australia, as in many other countries, major research grants are rare in the field of teacher education and as a result teacher educators often study their own teaching and their own programmes, producing a wide variety of studies that include many small-scale and often unconnected studies of practice. From reviews of this research, teacher educators and others have learnt a great deal about the curriculum of effective teacher education, which includes coursework, field experiences, assessment and pedagogical approaches (e.g. Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005; Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy 2002). However, as Grossman (2008) highlights, ‘as researchers and practitioners in the field of teacher education, we seem ill prepared to respond to critics who question the value of professional education for teachers with evidence of our effectiveness’ (13). Successive reviews of teacher education and teacher education research in Australia have come to similar conclusions (e.g. Australian Council of Deans of Education 1998; Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education 2003; Department of Employment Education and Training 1992, 1993; Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee 1998). Given the national policy push for alternatives to traditional teacher education pathways and questions about the value of teacher education, teacher educators must be prepared to respond to concerns with evidence of the effectiveness of teacher education and the value it adds, including a specific focus on the work of teacher educators.

Thus, over the past four or five decades there have been structural and conceptual shifts in teacher education; from training to education; and from a technical to an academic emphasis. These changes have had major implications for the career pathways and practices of teacher educators. Moreover, given the increasing government attention to the role of teacher education as it is currently offered, it is timely to examine the work of teacher educators.

Methodology
This qualitative study used a case study approach to investigating the career pathways and experiences of 19 teacher educators working in universities in three states of Australia: Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales. All teacher educators interviewed at the time were employed as full-time academics. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews that aimed to elicit information about the interviewees’ pathways into teacher education, challenges and career achievements, and their perspectives on the role of a teacher educator, including how they regarded themselves as researchers and/or teachers in the higher education context. Purposive sampling techniques were employed in order to build a participant profile that reflected diversity in terms of experience and institutional location. Thus, participants were selected from a range of institutional types in Australia: regional, metro-politan, established universities with a research intensive focus, and newer universities with an emerging research profile, as well as universities born out of the amalgamation of teachers’ colleges. We also selected participants with varying lengths of experiences within university and schools and other teaching contexts, as well as participants with and without doctoral qualifications. The 14 female and five male participants ranged in age from mid-30s to early 60s, with the majority being
in their mid-50s. In this respect, most participants had considerable work experience, be it teaching in a school or in a university (average approximately 23 years). As Figure 1 details, the participants had varying amounts of school teaching experience, ranging from less than one year to 25 years. Likewise, the participants had varying amounts of experience as a teacher educator, ranging from one year to 25 years. With the exception of one participant, all had some school teaching experience prior to becoming teacher educators. The different levels of experience enabled aspects of their career pathways to be considered in relation to the contexts and changes in teacher education and higher education in Australia over the last 30 years.

All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and returned to participants for verification, and are represented here with pseudonyms.

Analysis of research data, like all aspects of the research process, is shaped by researchers’ own positionings and histories. This study was conducted by four mid-career teacher educators working in two different universities, each a large multi-campus provider of teacher education and each in different Australian states. Collectively, the authors have been teacher educators for 52 years (Ninetta 15, Simone 15, Jane 16, Diane 21). All completed their doctoral qualifications while working as teacher educators and have had varying amounts of school teaching experience. For example, Ninetta taught for 11 years in secondary schools and adult education contexts before coming into the field, Jane taught for four years in secondary schools, Diane taught for 13 years in p-10 settings, and Simone taught for six years in primary schools. The interview questions were shaped by the authors’ knowledge of the teacher education field and their understanding of what constitutes the work of teacher educators. To some degree, the authors’ careers were reflected in the stories of some of the interviewees, and how they understood and interpreted the data includes who they are, and what experiences they bring to the research.
Data were analysed using a thematic approach, whereby close readings of the interview transcripts were made in order to identify common themes across participants’ recounted experiences. This paper reports on two main themes that emerged. The first was the unplanned nature of teacher educators’ career pathways, with many participants acknowledging their entry into the profession as ‘accidental’. The second is related to participants’ perceptions of the knowledge required to work in teacher education; how that knowledge is generated and valued; how it links to a researcher/practitioner binary; and how that binary has been negotiated by participants over time.

Becoming a teacher educator: the ‘accidental’ career

Entering the teacher education profession often appears to be a phenomenon of chance. The teacher educators in this study generally came directly from working as teachers and had extensive experience in either primary or secondary schools, but did not have doctoral qualifications. A few came with minimum school teaching experience and with higher degree qualifications and research expertise. However, regardless of their pathway, all participants in this study spoke about how they ‘fell into’ teacher education. For example, Spencer, who has been a teacher educator for more than 20 years, encapsulates what many described: ‘It was an accident ... it was not an active decision. It was one of those things that I just fell into’. Bill, who is in his mid-40s, likewise describes how he began a career as a teacher educator in 2001 after a chance meeting with an academic while attending an in-service professional development programme held at a university campus. He talks about his ‘accidental career’ which evolved after this meeting and comprised, in the first instance, part-time tutoring in teacher education along with relief school teaching and higher degree study and research. For James, his move into a full-time academic position happened quite by chance, meeting a dean at a conference with whom he ‘hit it off’ and who then invited him to apply for a position at his university. Mieke’s response below summarises many of the participants’ experiences. She explains:

I never set out to be a teacher educator, it was something that I fell into because I took leave of absence from a teaching position, a full-time teaching position, and during the beginning of that leave of absence I was approached at the previous university that I was at and they said ‘would you like to come and do some work for us’, and I thought it would work out quite well, and it did because it was very part time at that stage and it was something that I was interested in going into but it wasn’t something that I decided to go into. It was because the opportunity arose.

Participants regularly described themselves as ‘stumbling along’ within academe and learning to negotiate the different and often competing aspects of their work as teacher educators. Judy says, ‘It wasn’t until I was given my teaching brief that I started to think gosh, I have to know something about this in a way that I’ve never had to think before really’. In describing his own somewhat accidental journey from teacher to cooperating teacher to teacher educator, Zeichner explains how at first, he ‘was not aware at that time that there was an emerging literature on teacher education and that people had thought about the issue of teacher learning apart from the issue of learning in general’ (Zeichner 2005, 118). He is concerned that ‘Many universities today treat teacher education as a self-evident activity both for school and university-based teacher educators’ (118). Korthagen, Loughran, and Lunenberg (2005) claim, ‘teacher educators, whether intentionally or not, teach their students as well as teach about teaching’ (111). The work of teaching students at the same time as teaching them about teaching is a difficult task for the most experienced teacher educator, let alone a novice. Studies such as the one conducted by Murray and Male (2005) have shown that there is little in the way of induction, preparation or professional development for teacher educators in this unique role. They note that in the UK, the transition from school teacher to teacher educator is reported as stressful and new teacher educators are often uncertain about their new professional roles, reporting difficulty in adjusting to meeting the pedagogical needs of adult learners. Murray’s study (2008) found that most induction provision for new teacher educators occurs within teacher education departments, often at the micro-levels of the teaching team. She suggests that the knowledge, skills and understanding that teacher educators require for their work as teachers of teachers and researchers need to be included in a formal induction curriculum which includes communal and individual work-based activities to generate rich, informal learning opportunities (Murray 2008). Wilson also stresses the importance of learning to be a teacher educator: ‘I do not think that many
scholars of this new generation have opportunities to learn to teach teachers in structured and scholarly apprenticeships; instead, they are thrown into the practice of teacher education' (Wilson 2006, 315).

The majority of participants who were generally satisfied with the development of their academic careers had been mentored by an experienced teacher educator. Participants described 'learning to play the game' as a set of skills that those who had been well mentored tended to learn earlier in their career. These teacher educators were also at a higher level (associate professor or professor) within the university hierarchy than those who had not received mentoring and reported having been left to flounder on their own and work out by themselves what was involved in getting ahead in the academy. However, finding mentors had also been generally accidental and left to chance, rather than systematic. Some participants, like Mieke who was trying to complete her PhD at the same time as working as a part-time teacher educator, expressed frustration with the lack of clear career guidance and the lack of an explicit career trajectory:

There's a lot of filling the gaps for other people. But as long as you are just filling gaps for other people you are not actually doing much for yourself. And nobody actually explains that to you, you know, but it's far better for you to actually have a much clear sense of direction and goals before you actually get involved too far. ....It wasn't until I realised that I really wanted to do it as a future career that I began to take it far more seriously. But I think the problem is that as long as you are not focused on your own career, your own career path, nobody else is going to provide the direction.

In some cases, our participants reported that the lure of becoming a teacher educator was characterised by the 'seductiveness of academic life' (Lucy) that they experienced when teaching part-time in teacher education programmes, while either studying or teaching in schools. However, what often followed was a pro-cess of 'negotiating credibility', 'reconstructing themselves' and determining 'being effective' (Ramage 2005). It was a long and often painful journey involving the negotiation of an academic identity and credibility (through obtaining doctoral qualifications and working out how to build a research track record), as well as developing teacher education pedagogies. However, they often did not seem to understand what this involved or how to do this since there was little actual pre-paration for being a teacher educator, and despite having previous successful careers in school teaching, these new teacher educators faced significant challenges. The majority of teacher educators in Murray and Male's study (2005) 'took between two and three years to establish professional identities as teachers of teachers ... a long and sometimes difficult process' (134). Partly, and as result of being chal-lenged by the newness of their work, the participants voluntarily took on tasks that were familiar to them where they could use their skills developed as a school classroom teacher. These tasks were teaching in excess of what was expected and large amounts of administration and pastoral care of students. While these teaching and administration tasks provided some levels of job satisfaction in the short term, the sheer quantity of work and low-level nature of some tasks meant they were encumbered with work that held little prestige or contribution to career progress-ion. Such work, at times, was often worn as a 'badge of honour'; what Archer (2008) calls the discourse of 'flogging oneself', a common discourse within aca-dem. Other participants talked about letting go of tasks not rewarded in the academy and its promotion structures, and concentrating on those activities that are rewarded, most often perceived as securing research grants and publications. While these 'practices of protection' (Archer 2008) may have been a way of gaining legitimacy in the academy and progressing their careers, this caused dilemmas because many held fundamental beliefs about the value of investing time and energy in teaching. Although research on teacher educators' identities is not exten-sive, studies have found that teacher educators' identities are characterised by a strong commitment to students, teaching as an anchor of professional identity, and a range of attitudes towards, and ways of, engaging in research (e.g. Acker 1996; Ducharme 1993).

Being a teacher educator: valuing research and experiential knowledge

Participants' views on what knowledge and prior experiences were valuable to them as teacher educators were largely dependent on their own career histories. Within this sample, those with less teaching experience tended to value research more than teaching experience; those with more teaching experience tended to value practice-based knowledge above research, regardless of whether they had doctoral qualifications. Yet, each person also raised important points about the value of knowledge and experience in the field of teacher education. Some spoke about teaching in ways that suggested they saw it as a type of 'initiation' into teacher education. In some
respects, it was almost about ‘doing time’ in order to ‘earn one’s stripes’ as a teacher educator. Those with
significant teaching experience said it was harder for teacher educators without significant teaching experience
because it was harder for their expertise to be regarded as credible. There was a sense that those ‘who had
not been near a school for years’ were not in the ‘real world’. During the course of the interviews, there were
numerous ‘battle stories’ of life in schools and claims that these were the bases on which classroom skills and
knowledge about students, curricula and education contexts should be built. Many reported frequent tensions
between faculty with strong teaching backgrounds and those without. Penny, who has worked for five years as
a teacher educator in one of the ‘Group of 8’ universities (also referred to as the ‘Go8’, they are generally the
more established of the Australian universities, are considered research intensive, and are often the most
wealthy and most prestigious) and before that, as a teacher for 25 years, says:

If someone is a wonderful communicator and a great scholar they can learn enough to be really engaging and
wonderful as a teacher educator, I’m sure. But it’s harder. How do you know what you’re actually talking about
when you talk about classrooms if you haven’t lived in one? In what other area of life could you actually teach
someone something if you’d never done it? Would you want a pilot educating people who has never flown a plane or
a surgeon who’d never done an operation, teaching medical students? It wouldn’t work. But we do it in teacher
education.

In contrast, Lisa who is a young and emerging researcher with only a year of school teaching experience, is
aware of the criticism directed at teacher educators like herself. She says:

I always think it is amusing when people say you’ve got to have school teaching experience to be a teacher educator.
I teach all the time so does that mean I don’t have any experience of teaching, what sort of teaching are they talking
about? Is it really that different being in a secondary classroom to being here at university? My experience with 18
and 19 year olds was not that dissimilar to my experience with 16 and 17 year olds so I don’t give that argument a
lot of credibility.... I am of the feeling that it’s good to have both; it’s good to have some people who have had 20
years’ experience in the classroom and it’s good to have people like me.

Some respondents raised issues around the lack of recognition given to teaching experience within the
university, despite its importance to most teacher educators. The need to have doctoral qualifications for
promotion and so on, was of concern to those without them. One particular interviewee with 20 years of school
teaching experience but no doctoral qualification believed in the importance of research that linked practice
with theory because of its potential to further the scholarship of teaching. She was, however, clearly
frustrated by failed attempts to gain funding for a ‘grassroots’ project she believed had practical and applied
benefits:

We’ve been running some research around that [school-based practice] for 3–4 years now, even though we can’t get
any funding for it. We’re not famous enough to get funding. See, there’s another issue there too. The issue there
being that really important research about those connections never gets off the ground because it’s not done by big
names, it’s done by us scummy little teacher educators with no PhDs, who have been in schools trying to do these
things, and we don’t even get on the board.

Even those academics with a PhD but who were not well published commented on the research–practice
divide within universities as well as the constant pressure to publish in high-quality impact journals. For
example, Penny says:

Some people privilege the research by a factor of five over teaching; teaching sometimes is something you could
farm out, you’ll get a PhD student to do it or you’ll get a sessional to do it or you’ll get someone to do your marking.
Teaching is the last thing you think of because it’s actually not highly valued. We have huge infrastructure for
research. We have a research office, we have a lot of research money, we have a lot of support for anyone who is
applying for a grant, an incredible amount. The office is full of people to help you, but there are no offices full of
people to help you with your pedagogy.
Greg, who is one of the few teacher educators who is both a practitioner of 17 years' experience and an established researcher, takes a balanced view of the teaching/research binary that characterised many of the participants’ views.

I think in order to be a teacher educator I think you need to have the big picture scholarly perspective to bring to the experience you will have had as a practising teacher in schools. Because in order to be an effective teacher educator, you need to be more than, you know, a highly skilled teacher. Because what we’re doing in teacher education is not just transferring skills, it’s not about training, you know.

Many times there was a dawning realisation (often at the point of first application for promotion and subsequent lack of success) that they were not playing the game to their advantage. This then manifested itself as a feeling of resentment, believing that they had spent time doing things that are now not really 'counted' and rewarded in the academy. Lucy, whose teaching focus was on the preparation of students for periods of professional experience in schools, believes her decision to take such a path had hindered her career progression:

And it suddenly dawned on me that all my colleagues who went for senior lecturer [applied for promotion] at the same time as I did, all got it, and I was the only one who didn’t get it. And you know it wasn’t from lack of being involved, it was just lack of research. That was the area. So I knew if I wanted to continue on in this career, then I really needed to get out of professional experience and get into research ... the bottom line really still is that it’s research that matters when it comes to promotion.

Discussion
With the expected increased demand for teacher educators in Australia due to the ageing workforce, it is timely to understand more about teacher educators, who they are, how they think about their job and how they negotiate the demands of the higher education context. While teacher education is often seen as the key to preparing qualified teachers who are best able to educate students for the demands of the twenty-first century, there has been relatively little attention paid in the research literature to the teacher educators who do this work. This study investigated the pathways into teacher education and the career trajectories of a small group of teacher educators working in a range of university sites in two states in Australia.

Teacher educators are a highly diverse group, but at the heart of the challenge to their career progression and career satisfaction is their positioning 'betwixt tower and field' (Heap 2006, cited in Kitchen 2007). Many struggle to balance the competing demands of field and tower. Some are mainly beholden to the 'field', particularly those who have been employed because of their experiences in schools. Others are beholden to the 'ivory tower', especially those who identify primarily as researchers. In between, there are many individuals with experiences in and loyal ties to both the university and the school. Regardless of where individual teacher educators are located on this continuum, they experience tension as they attempt to serve both masters (Kitchen 2007) and try to negotiate a professionally rewarding and career enhancing space for themselves.

However, all the teacher educators in this study, irrespective of where they positioned themselves in terms of 'tower' and 'field', had 'fallen into' teacher education work, sometimes accepting an invitation to work part-time in teacher education programmes while still teaching in schools. It appears that 'teacher educator' is not usually a career of conscious choice. This presents dilemmas as the 'seduction of academe' lures them out of the school sector. They are recruited because of their expertise in the field. It is only later, with a growing realisation of the requirements of the role a university academic plays, that many begin to reject the teaching and administrative tasks they had so willingly taken on to embrace research, sometimes moving out of the field of learning to teach as their focus of scholarship. Moreover, many feel resentful that the teaching and administration work that often requires large amounts of time in pastoral care of pre-service teachers is not recognised as sufficient for career progression. Thus, it is important that the teaching profession and academe understand the role of 'teacher educator' within the context of 'academic' as one with its own field of research and scholarship as well as an informed knowledge base about learning to teach. It is important that doctoral
programmes nurture prospective teacher educators into the role of academic and the important work of teacher education. Failure to do that will mean a continuing cycle of ‘fall-ing into’ teacher education in a casual capacity, then realising that the expertise in the field that made them attractive to the teacher education programmes in the first instance is not sufficient for a career in higher education, and finally a rejection of teacher education as their area of research, scholarship and academic leadership.

For many teacher educators in this study, the role of a significant mentor was critical. It opened up for them the possibility of higher education work and, most importantly, mentors helped them to understand the role of university academic and the relevant balance of research and teaching in their work, as well as the critical role of the PhD in preparation for academic work, not just as a hurdle to overcome but a requirement to work in the higher education context. When viewed as a hurdle requirement, the need to attain a doctoral qualification often adds to the view that school teaching experience and practice-based knowledge are not valued, resulting in a rejection of the work of teacher education and a move to more ‘accepted’ fields of study and research which are seen to be valued and rewarded in the academy. Thus, we argue for clear career pathways in teacher education with relevant career incentives and close mentoring to help novice teacher educators plan for and achieve career goals.

However, the expectation that teacher educator knowledge be grounded in teaching as well as research can pose particular problems for individuals and institutions in a number of ways. As nearly 50% of students entering initial teacher education in Australia are over 25 years of age (Cumming 2010), those who enter academe as experienced teachers are likely to be mature. This is particularly the case for those who also hold doctoral qualifications before taking up a university appointment. The typical doctoral candidate in education in Australia is in their 50s (Cumming 2010). Clearly, there are issues of workforce planning for universities when academics are of mature age, but early in their career in terms of research experience. If experienced practitioners take up appointments in universities, then work towards the completion of doctoral studies on a part-time basis, progress is usually slow, especially if they have limited or no study leave. The achievement of doctoral qualifications can come at great personal cost in terms of work–life balance. With the recent introduction in Australia of research accountability measures such as the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) assessment (which was initiated by the Australian government in 2010 and is designed to assess research quality within Australia’s higher education institutions using a combination of indicators and expert review by committees comprising experienced, internationally recognised experts), there is greater scrutiny of universities and the pressure for staff to research and publish has become intense. In addition, once ensconced in academe, the conditions of work that would enable a teacher educator to maintain classroom teaching, university teaching and research are both uncommon and difficult within the current organisation of schools and universities.

One could argue that teacher education is a specialised field without specialists. Many ‘fall into’ it and there is a lack of systematic preparation for teacher educators, whether they emerge from schools or the academy. If teacher education is to be regarded as a specialised field of scholarship and practice, there is a need for effective professional development within the context of doctoral studies in the area of teacher education pedagogies. As Suzanne Wilson reminds us:

> Learning to be a teacher educator researcher requires understanding the practice of teaching and the practice of teacher education research. And both require making one’s work public and open for critique. And much as our institutions, language, and structures tend to treat those processes – learning to teach and learning to research – as separate, my own experience has persuaded me repeatedly that locating oneself in a dialectic between research and teaching is a fruitful, provocative way to master both
> especially when one’s research is about the very practice that one engages in as a teacher. (Wilson 2006, 316)

Zeichner identified that teacher educator researchers have a special responsibility in preparing the new generation of teacher educators and for generating new knowledge about how to do the work of teacher education more effectively:

> If this new generation of teacher educators goes into their roles with knowledge of the scholarly literature related to the work of teacher education and with the dispositions and skills to study their practice it will make it better for novice teachers and their pupils will benefit. (Zeichner 2005, 118)
He describes a series of doctoral courses at the University of Wisconsin–Madison that are focused on the study of teacher education:

These include courses on supervision and mentoring teachers, pre-service teacher education and teacher education policy issues, teacher professional development, and action research and reflective practice in teacher education. Some doctoral students ... work in our teacher education programs ... In these teacher education courses, the prospective teacher educators think about theoretical, historical, curriculum and policy issues in the field in relation to their work in a teacher education program. (Zeichner 2005, 118)

Other universities have similar foci in their doctoral programmes. Wilson (2006) focuses on the substance of doctoral preparation and asks what the new generation of teacher researchers would need to know about teacher education, relevant disciplines, research methodologies, teaching in universities and K-12 schooling. However, it is important to consider the cultural clash between the worldviews of the teacher and researcher as school teachers move into academe and take on the role of educational researcher through their doctoral studies (whether in teacher education or not) (Labaree 2003). As he suggests, as doctoral students, teachers may feel they are being asked to transform their cultural orientation from normative to analytical, from personal to intellectual, from particular to universal, and from experiential to theoretical. As a result, they often resist. He concludes that differences in worldview between teachers and researchers cannot be eliminated easily because they arise from irreducible differences in the nature of the work that teachers and researchers do.

It is clear that none of this is easy. But, if we are to sustain the teacher educator profession and ensure that the next generation of teacher educators is well prepared for the job and is successful within academe, we must learn from the experiences and professional opportunities and challenges described by the teacher educators in this study. If we are to break the cycle associated with ‘falling into’ teacher education work, becoming a teacher educator must be a career pathway of choice that is well supported, where prospective teacher educators are well prepared, drawing on a rigorously theorised knowledge base, and where career trajectories and transitions within academe are clear, achievable and relevant.

References


