

Chapter 14

Learning from Stories of Becoming

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Introduction

The narrative accounts of becoming a teacher educator presented in this volume, particularly but not exclusively through self-study, have provided deep insights not only into individuals' professional learning, but also into the connections and commonalities of experience across diverse geographic and institutional contexts. The complexities and processes of professional becoming have been documented elsewhere in the literature, and a brief discussion of this follows. However, the importance of this volume is brought to the fore in the remainder of the chapter as the threads that link these diverse teacher educators' experiences across nations, and social and pedagogical cultures, are woven together through a dialogic account of our own learning from these stories of becoming.

Becoming a Teacher Educator – Construction of a New Professional Identity

As the narratives in this book have demonstrated, becoming a teacher educator is an on-going process of constructing and re-constructing a new professional identity. This is often in response to personal and professional experiences of transition that call for deep reflection and meaning-making within the social, cultural, educational

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and institutional contexts in which teacher educators find themselves. Beijaard et al. (2004) maintained that the construction of a professional identity cannot be simply seen from an individual perspective, but rather, it must be seen within the sociocultural context of teachers' work and lives. Beijaard et al. noted that rather than asking the question "Who am I?" in relation to identity, the more appropriate question is "Who am I at this moment?" (p. 108). While the personal is a key element in identity formation, the context in which the individual is embedded has a significant influence on their understanding of self. This includes institutional contexts, the perceptions and expectations of others, evolving beliefs and understandings that inform practice, and the relationships developed with others in the learning community. Although the term 'identity' is often used in the singular, Beijaard et al. argued that teachers actually have multiple 'sub-identities' that need to be relatively well balanced if a cohesive sense of self is to be achieved. An array of such 'sub-identities' is certainly visible within the narratives presented here.

De Weerd et al. (2006) argued that identity construction and/or transformation is an outcome of personal and intercontextual factors, and that involves "the change in concepts and images that relate to who we consider ourselves to be and the development of a healthy self-worth and self-confidence" (p. 317). It is a process of individual sense-making in conjunction with the influences of contextual factors and relationships, a confluence of the inner world of our own perceptions of our worth and safety with the outer world of our working and learning contexts. Wells (2007) also highlighted the importance of relationships and discourse in identity development. Taking a cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) perspective, and drawing on the notion of 'communities of practice,' Wells argued that "each of the various communities in which we participate consists of members whose varied trajectories of identity construction enable them to contribute in ways that enrich and potentially transform the practices of the community, which, simultaneously, transform the possibilities for the identity construction of each of its members" (p. 102). The narratives in this volume clearly illustrate the influence of professional and personal relationships and institutional contexts on the evolving identity and practice of teacher educators.

Murray et al. (2009) maintained that, in many ways distinct from school teachers, 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" (p. 41). As such, this knowledge and expertise needs to be more visible. As Bullough (2008) reminded us that:

For the personal theories underpinning the practice of teaching and teacher education to become open to change, when change is warranted, such theories must be made explicit. When they are not, common sense reigns supreme and for good or ill practice reproduces itself and lives on as habit (p.227).

Despite often being overlooked there is a growing wealth of literature that examines the professional learning of teacher educators, much of it written by those studying their own practice, as well as research undertaken by others. For example,

Williams et al. (2012) reviewed a large body of self-study literature on becoming a teacher educator, with particular reference to the transition from teacher to teacher educator, and concluded that “the process of becoming a teacher educator involves the complex and challenging tasks of examining beliefs and values grounded in personal biography, especially that of being a former school teacher; navigating the complex social and institutional contexts within which they work, and developing a personal pedagogy of teacher education that enables them to construct a new professional identity as a teacher educator” (p.245). It was evident from many of the studies reviewed by Williams et al. that an integral part of the process of becoming a teacher educator involves examining existing practices, beliefs and assumptions about being a teacher, based on previous experience in that role, and determining how these practices, beliefs and assumptions inform their work as teacher educators. Institutional contexts and constraints also impact on the development of a teacher educator identity, because “Not only are teacher educators required to learn the explicit rules of the institution, they also have to navigate the implicit cultural rules that permeate the ways in which teacher education is enacted in particular institutions” (p. 251). Perhaps the greatest challenge for novice teacher educators is to develop their personal pedagogy of teacher education, taking into account the influence of biography and institutional context. Williams et al. noted that “A personal pedagogy is seen by many beginning teacher educators as a way to define who they are as teacher educators. The struggle for a sense of self appeared to be very closely aligned to the maintenance of authenticity in teaching, and to having a voice within the structures and practices of the faculty/department” (p. 254).

As this volume shows, the sense of self is also situated within the wider story, where key landmarks and reference points help teacher-educators to make sense of who they are within the wider social, political and educational landscape of teacher education. They demonstrate how becoming a teacher educator does not just happen when one is employed in that role. It is a career-long journey of becoming, and is influenced by new and changing circumstances and ways of thinking and doing, which are a constant feature of the professional lives of teacher educators. As evidenced here, transitions might involve moving from working as a school or kindergarten teacher to being a teacher educator in a university; working in different institutional and geographic or national contexts; and/or personal, philosophical, institutional, policy and/or pedagogical changes over time. As we can see in other collections about the professional learning of teacher educators, not necessarily based on self-study accounts, there is growing understanding of what it means to be a teacher educator. For example, Bates et al. (2011) discussed issues such as induction of novice teacher educators into the profession; the importance of communities of learners within teacher education; the general lack of formal mentoring of beginning teacher educators; and the challenges inherent in developing teacher education curricula. In Rodrigues’ (2014) handbook for early career teacher educators there is much information and advice on a range of topics – the ‘signature’ pedagogy of teacher education; reflection on practice; subject matter/content knowledge; professional integrity and ethics; collaboration/partnerships; quality assurance. While these and other collections are no doubt of use for beginning teacher educators as

they transition from successful classroom practitioner to teacher of teachers, they tend to focus on *being* a teacher educator and *doing* teacher education, rather than the process of *becoming* a teacher educator. The latter is the central theme of the narratives contained in the current collection.

Learning from Narratives of Becoming

As the editors of this collection, we believe that these stories of individuals' experiences of professional becoming make a significant contribution to knowledge about how people learn to become teacher educators, and to understanding how narrative and self-study research can illuminate important aspects of professional becoming. All the contributors to this book have shared a variety of personal and career transitions that lead them to new understandings about themselves as individuals and as teacher educators, with particular reference to their work as self-study and narrative inquiry scholars. The authors were asked by us to provide a narrative account of their professional journey as a teacher educator, bearing in mind the following questions:

1. What are the most significant themes that have emerged from your research?
2. What are the important theoretical frameworks/positions that inform your narrative?
3. What important changes, transitions or transformations have you experienced in your career? How have these changes impacted on your professional knowledge, identity and practice as a teacher educator?
4. What advice would you give to those beginning their career as a teacher educator, based on your accumulated wisdom as a teacher educator? OR What contribution does your experience and research make to knowledge about the profession of teacher education?

As you will have seen from reading their accounts, the authors responded with skill and insight to the space and the framework provided, by contributing a collection of engaging and insightful narratives. As the editors of this collection, we identified very strongly with the experiences and understandings presented so compellingly by the authors as we worked with them throughout the development of this book. We recognised and shared many similar experiences and opportunities for professional learning as teacher educators over the past decade or so. We also gained insights into experiences that were very different from our own. On reflecting upon these, we wondered what wisdom we could take from their collective experiences, and based on this, what we might have said to ourselves as beginning teacher educators a decade or so ago. What insights from our colleagues would have been most valuable as we were embarking on our own professional journeys of becoming teacher educators? What advice would have supported and informed our developing professional identities and practice? Here, we present the wisdom that we, as editors, believe the authors have offered explicitly and tacitly, as they

presented their experiences of becoming to the scrutiny of their peers. To do this, we have engaged in a written dialogue about the key themes that each of us has identified in the collection, making connections to our own experiences while making sense of these collective stories of becoming. We hope that readers of this collection, and in particular, those new to teacher education, will gain valuable insights about what it means to become a teacher educator, and can identify visions and stories of learning from others that resonate with them, and help them on their own complex and exciting journeys of becoming.

Mike

I am struck by the way in which ‘space’ appears in different ways throughout these narratives. There is the recurring theme of learning from transition in physical space and how this can transform thinking: Tom’s formative experience of working in Nigeria and Susan’s move from the English summer to the frozen Canadian north; Nathan heads south from the USA to Australia as Mandi leaves Melbourne bound for Northern Europe. Going away to find out who they are and what they want to do transforms these authors; others move nationally or more locally. Each story takes its author across borders and though different spaces, and across a number of settings, as they look back from their current location to consider their own journey of how they got there and what they have learnt along the way. Another thing that stands out for me is that learning happens best when teachers and teacher educators provide safe emotional, intellectual and pedagogical spaces within which they and their students can learn. Avril and Shawn illustrate the improvisation and variations on curriculum themes which exemplify and model teaching that nourishes fundamental human needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Joe advises that we should relinquish control to gain influence as one of his pedagogic axioms. The safe space that these teacher educators provide allows for mistakes, ‘failure’ and dialogue between student and teacher that challenges notions of narrow standardisation and audits of success. This resonates for me when I consider my own experience of initially ‘failing’ at every level of education and what seemed at the time like a long period of uncertainty and perceived setback in becoming a teacher educator.

Judy

Learning from ‘mistakes’ and ‘failure’ also struck me as a significant concept in several of the chapters. Rather than seeing this as a negative experience, although it probably felt it at the time, learning from difficult experiences seemed to inspire people to think even more deeply about their position, their beliefs, their practices and their capacities to learn and grow. Some of these supposed ‘failures’ were due to the prevailing institutional and policy contexts, which are yet another type of

'space' in which people become teacher educators. Starting with their experiences as children in school and young adults in university programs, and in their work as more experienced academics, many of the authors cited the influence of either supportive or destructive educational environments, and the perception of having failed in some way to fulfil the expectations of others, which actually laid the foundation for many of their current beliefs and practices as teacher educators. Tom talked about how responding to a failed radical program innovation actually helped to cement his ideas about the importance of learning from experience; Dawn's initial failed attempts to gain promotion based on the scholarship of teaching rather than through the more traditional route of research lead to her 'crusader' identity of 'indestructibility' and a firm knowledge that she can 'make a difference.' Alan and Nathan both experienced a sense of failure in their formal undergraduate education, but these experiences only served to strengthen their resolve to be different university teachers from those they experienced in their own education. Their pedagogical ideals and values are deeply rooted in these experiences of dysfunction and alienation.

I was moved by many of the narratives that illustrated, perhaps partly in response to perceived failures or struggles, that transitions through time and space require teacher educators to draw on personal characteristics and qualities to get them through. Many of the authors mentioned intrinsic qualities such as courage and tenacity (Susan); courage, vulnerability, uncertainty, fear, open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness (Mandi and Rachel); resilience (Dawn); and clarity of pedagogical vision, courage, persistence (Shawn, Jason and Nathan). Perhaps the most common quality was 'courage' – becoming a teacher educator actually takes courage to overcome fear, vulnerability, institutional constraints and personal challenges. When I began my career as a teacher educator, fear was all-encompassing. I must have had courage to live with and in time overcome my fears, but I have never explicitly thought about this until now. I certainly wouldn't have described myself as courageous. I remind my students that learning to teach is scary and that it is important to acknowledge and seek out support for their fears, and as many of these chapters attest, the same applies to those of us who are learning to be teacher educators. When reading the chapters, I was struck by the deep humanity and honesty that these teacher educators laid bare when they were sharing with us their journeys of becoming.

Mike

I agree that honesty and humanity shine through the narrative voice of every chapter in a way that allows the reader to know the author as person as well as professional. I found that Julian's focus on relational teacher education, where he identifies seven characteristics of an approach that places student experience and student needs at the centre of his pedagogy, is a very explicit example of a theme that links all the chapters. Respect and empathy are foregrounded through open and honest

relationships that place the teacher educator as learner as well as expert. Similarly, Tom asks his students what they are learning as a way of finding out whether he is meeting their needs as well as getting them to reflect on what they do need. Here, Tom is also modelling an approach that he wants the students to use in their own teaching, and this highlights the unusual situation of teacher educators, that is, they are teaching about and *through* teaching. I remember that this is a point developed by Lunenburg et al. (2007) who pointed out that in this respect:

the teacher education profession is unique, differing from, say, doctors who teach medicine. During their teaching, doctors do not serve as role models for the actual practice of the profession i.e., they do not treat their students. Teacher educators, conversely, whether intentionally or not, teach their students as well as teach about teaching (p.588).

Judy

Yes, the importance of relationships in learning and teaching, and in becoming a teacher educator, was perhaps one of the strongest themes I found across all the chapters. This is something that I don't think I even considered when I embarked on my new career as a teacher educator. I remember feeling very much alone and feeling that everyone but me knew what they were doing and (to my eyes) were confident and competent in that knowledge. Susan repeatedly emphasised the role of others in her professional becoming, as did Alan ('we' over 'me') and Dawn who talked about the importance of people, past and present. These were not just personal or professional friendships and support networks, but active collaboration in learning about and doing teacher education – collaboration with students, colleagues, doctoral supervisors and in some cases administrators. In my own experience, this world of collaboration opened up slowly at first, as I often didn't feel worthy of others' interest and time, but like Susan, my world has also unfolded with "local, national and global networks of colleagues...who enrich and enhance my life and work." It is interesting to read that such a world also opened up for Joe at the Castle conference, coincidentally the same place where our (Mike and Judy's) professional paths first crossed. This is where I first saw that I did indeed have a network of collaborators and critical friends, some current and others who would become known in the future. These narratives attest to the central role of relationships and collaboration in helping those, who are open to these opportunities, on the road to becoming a teacher educator.

Mike

Yes, just as we have gone on to work on various projects together, collaboration has also been central in developing deep reflection, which sits at the centre of these narratives and each author's pedagogy. This initially surprised me as I have most often

thought of reflection as an essentially individual, introspective activity. Helena and Rodrigo illustrate that this is not always the case through their own dialogue that tells the story of how their thinking and understanding developed in relation to that of each other. They came to see themselves and their own work in new ways as they shared their reflections with each other. As with Mandi and Rachel, this is partly about looking inward as they shape their thoughts for a trusted colleague and partly about looking and listening outwardly as they learn from each other. Reflection is a tool for closing the gap between theory and practice, or the gap between pedagogy as professed and pedagogy as practiced. This also involves looking not only inward and outward but also back on experience and then forward towards re-imagining practice (Julian and Jason). Joe's discomfort in academia leads him to reflective analysis, not withdrawal or entrenchment as he finds some firm footing amongst the 'oddballs' at the Castle conference. Finding that firm footing without entrenchment is the role of reflexivity, which becomes a key pedagogical skill and the central theme of each story. Schön (1971) said that all real learning comes from a feeling of being lost or being at sea. This sense of disorientation features in each of the stories. Reflexivity does not remove feelings of uncertainty for Avril or Nathan but helps them to find their sea legs and move around more freely in the rocky seas of teacher education, on either side of the world. This involves learning from experience by not only recounting the past, as we have learnt from the privilege of working with these authors and seeing these chapters develop, but through engaging in deep reflection on those experiences, and bringing new understandings to the present and potentially, shaping the future.

Judy

Just as you have likened teacher education as being a 'rocky sea' which needs to be navigated, it also struck me that many of the authors used metaphors to help them reflect on their past and present work, and to make sense of how they saw themselves and the journey they were taking to become teacher educators. The book is about 'journeys' of becoming, a metaphor in itself, and I think Susan summed it up well in the title of her paper – the long and winding road. Twists, turns, u-turns and changes of direction all constituted her journey from student teacher to teacher to administrator to academic and teacher educator. Similarly, Avril uses 'storylines' to find her way in a shifting educational landscape, while Mandi and Rachel use 'sacred stories' to chart their course into and through academia. Shawn turns to the performing arts genre to 'direct' his own story as a teacher educator, where story and character are invoked to illustrate his journey 'there and back again', just like Bilbo Baggins' journey in *The Hobbit*. A fictional character was also invoked by Dawn, who likened herself as *Crusader Rabbit*, having the determination and invincibility needed to progress up the rungs of the academic career ladder. The use of metaphor to examine the professional identity of student teachers and teachers is found in the literature (Hunt 2006; Pinnegar et al. 2011; Thomas and Beauchamp

2011), but it is less evident in relation to teacher educators. Why did the teacher educators in this collection turn to metaphoric representations to express their sense of self? Perhaps it provided them with another perspective or lens through which to see themselves which East (2009) argued was an important role of metaphor in examining practice. “Understanding metaphors helps us make better sense of events or concepts in our experience... Deliberate examination of current or past practices through metaphor can foreground new perspectives and new insights on practice” (p. 22).

Conclusions

Earlier in this chapter we posed two questions to ourselves as editors, and more importantly, as fellow teacher educators: What insights from our colleagues would have been most valuable as we were embarking on our own professional journeys to becoming teacher educators? What advice would have supported and informed our developing professional identities and practice? These are questions that perhaps other beginning teacher educators, or indeed teacher educators at any stage of their career, might also ask as they grapple with the complex and often confronting web of relationships, ideologies, institutional structures and policies that inform their daily work. From our reading of the chapters presented in this volume, and the conversation above about our own learning from these narratives of becoming, we conclude that the process of becoming a teacher educator is as much about the journey as the destination. The road to becoming a teacher educator is more often than not a winding path of diverse experiences and unfamiliar spaces, which provide opportunities for reflection on learning, both within ourselves and with our colleagues, with many of whom we have forged strong personal and professional relationships. This road helps us to reframe our understanding of learning and teaching, and to enact a pedagogy of teacher education that sits comfortably with our philosophical stance. The foundation for this stance very often lays within our experiences as learners in school or university, and in our respective spaces as beginning teacher educators, striving to find a comfortable place within academia and the institutional structures in which we work.

Perhaps one of the most important conclusions to be made from this collection, and one that would have helped us when we first embarked on our journeys of becoming, is that while individual experiences are unique to those involved, teacher educators are not alone. They are part of a wider network of colleagues, some known, some still to be encountered, that are there to guide and support them on this exciting journey. Collegiality and collaboration is at the heart of becoming a teacher educator, and it is up to individuals to seek out and embrace the connections they are fortunate enough to discover. We return to the metaphor first presented in the Foreword of this book, that is, becoming a teacher educator as an 'heroic journey.' While some might consider the term 'heroic' to be too strong a term, Bob Bullough deftly unpacks the various ways in which those featured in this collection were

heroic in their responses to the twists and turns of their professional journeys of becoming. We would argue that the narratives contained within highlight the essential humanity of teacher educators and the underlying moral dimensions of teacher education as a profession. It is not enough to get a job as a teacher educator – it is essential that we seek out our colleagues, learn from experience (theirs and ours) through deep reflection, direct our own performance, and develop and enact ethical pedagogies that ensure that the education we provide for teachers is based on sound morally grounded principles.

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