Teacher Education for Transformative Agency

Critical perspectives
on design, content
and pedagogy

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An agenda for reinventing teacher education in South Africa: Next steps for deliberation

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Reflecting with and for teacher education

Looking into South African teacher education from the outside, it feels very familiar. How can this be, when I am from Australia, a 'global North' country in the geographic South? Our demographic and economic conditions are quite different. There are fewer than 3% of the Indigenous peoples of Australia left alive compared to the 75–80% in South Africa. Australia, while still working through colonial legacies, did not experience an apartheid regime. Yet there are common historical trajectories. Our countries are both former colonies of the British Empire, the logic of mass schooling and its associated inequalities are palpable, and teacher education is positioned to service the formation of the nation state through providing teachers who accept their role. South Africa suffered its emergence into the post-apartheid period in the heyday of economic globalisation – which also altered what might be expected of the nation state in its relations with citizens, including through education. Despite this, as I have learned, most people invested hope for shifting opportunities for

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the majority black population, and other minority groups, in education. Yet, as can more clearly be seen now, education cannot shift societal mores, habits and identities without major public shifts in other domains, including economic redistribution and opportunities to participate in debates and reinventions of institutions. Education can be part of such important shifts but cannot do so 'on behalf of' everyone else, every other institution.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), emphasising its economic credentials, has published a number of reports giving priority to the role of schools, teachers and teacher education in building national economic competitiveness. This has tended, in many countries, to place economic purposes at the centre of the educational effort, with significant push-back among the profession in many countries over some time (Furlong, Cochran-Smith & Brennan, 2009). This reminder goes some way to explain why we in Australia have similar debates as those represented in this book. How do schooling and its teachers deal with diversity and inequality, social stratification and the hopes invested in education to provide social and economic mobility? How do students and communities deal with the differences between those who teach and their students? How do beginning teachers learn to work with students different to themselves – culturally, linguistically, economically? In secondary schools, how does the subject knowledge of schools and teacher qualifications in disciplines begin to recognise other knowledges? And, we also raise the question of mediating between traditional 'ownership' of their units/modules by individual academics and the need to create a programme that builds on its parts.

We have in common the regulatory nation state and the bureaucracy that is inter-nationally prevalent to surveille education institutions, establish standards via standardisation, approve programmes and curriculum, and measure performance in teaching and research. Yet the conditions in our two countries are quite different, though we share many of the effects in our work and workload. In recent years, teacher educators in many countries have been constrained into a compliance register: worried about performativity measures and regulations. Moving beyond compliance (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018) into a broader, more collaborative set of research programmes is critical to support one another and our own university students, as well as the schools and communities they serve. This book brings out ways in which the regulatory state works its way into one university programme. Examining it as a whole is quite instructive about conditions in South Africa, the 'practice architectures' (Kemmis, 2009) which pull together the 'sayings, doings and relatings' which are taken for granted in the everyday work of the faculty.

Issues set up in this book

As the Introduction lays out, the chapters here arise from shared discussions across staff in the whole Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme. This in itself is an achievement. There are few large-scale studies of teacher education, and most who research in teacher education usually do so in small single classroom studies, remaining in disciplinary silos: science education, education psychology, teaching art or sociology, for example. We write on professional placement, on the pedagogies of our own subject. The lack of larger studies is partly an issue of poor funding, partly a workload issue, and points to a lack of respect for practitioner-oriented research domains. When even the USA with all its resources, has to commission research agendas for teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2006), it is not surprising that poorer countries do not have vibrant research cultures in teacher education. Ken Zeichner's (2007) call to accumulate studies across what have been largely individual self-studies thus has global resonance for teacher educators. He reminds us all that we have to consider the theoretical project as well as work towards improvement of practice.

The teacher educators here have taken the important step of problematising the programmatic issues underpinning each of their subjects by engaging in shared deliberation on key starting points. These include:

- ◀ “How to navigate within teacher education from the ravages of apartheid education to inclusive, democratic practices that address the developmental needs of the majority of our citizens.
- ◀ The desire to move out of academic ‘silos’ and to work across subjects and departments to build a shared understanding of the programme.
- ◀ How to ensure structural and conceptual coherence across the programme, while allowing lecturers the academic freedom to engage students critically within their discipline.
- ◀ How to engage with the demands of knowledge-building in the twenty-first century.
- ◀ How to integrate different forms of knowledge across the curriculum” (America, Edwards & Robinson, Chapter 1).

The book represents a set of engagements with these questions, and in the process establishes a longer term set of issues to grapple with, as the programme design evolves in practice and in relation to policy guidelines. Such shared deliberation among programme staff contributes to the possibility of iterative cycles contributing to knowledge-in-practice and knowledge-of-practice. In a sense, the questions open up what Freire (1993/1970) called generative themes – problematising key dimensions of teacher education practice as

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the programme, its staff and university transition to a changing world. The COVID-19 pandemic adds further fuel to questions about the purposes of schooling, the role of the teacher, the practices of pedagogies and the potential contribution which teacher education might make to the schooling sector and the wider South African society.

What do I see as being put on the teacher education scholarly-praxis agenda in the book? These questions above open up serious work, both specific to South Africa and also relevant in other countries and regions. The address made to them emerges from representing that work, allowing the authors the space to examine such issues as:

- ◀ Who are our pre-service teachers?
- ◀ What do they need to know and be able to do?
- ◀ How do students and academic staff relate among themselves and learn with and from one another?
- ◀ What are our curriculum design and pedagogic practices?
- ◀ How are they shaped by the particular university in which we work?
- ◀ How do we change our practices?
- ◀ What do each of our modules offer towards a programme?
- ◀ What key concepts are being offered for exploration and understanding?
- ◀ What is a good teacher? A good pre-service teacher? A good teacher educator?
- ◀ What conceptual resources and language are needed for pre-service teachers to understand and teach for multilingual, diverse cultures?
- ◀ How do we contribute to changing schooling?
- ◀ How do we meet changes in the society more broadly, to contribute to social justice?

In taking up these starter questions outlined in the introductory chapter as the basis for discussion, I would suggest that we are invited to follow them up as a way of problematising university pedagogy and partnership with schools in the decolonial moment (Soudien, 2020). In South Africa, this follows the #FeesMustFall and 'decolonise the curriculum' movements, which teacher educators have joined, although they have seldom articulated issues specific to their field of knowledge and practice. These are programme design questions which put a spotlight on individual academic pedagogic practices but also imply questions about what is possible to do differently across individual modules.

What is post-apartheid teacher education in a teacher education programme?

In the introduction, the editors noted the first question of how teacher education deals with “the ravages of apartheid”: post-apartheid teacher education is challenged to unpack the deeply historically formed practices of both the university and schooling. These chapters show some key dimensions of how the challenges work themselves into the daily practices of academic teaching, of curriculum design, relations among pre-service teachers and between teachers and pre-service teachers. Post-apartheid is represented in a range of ways in these chapters. In some chapters it is contextual: a societal condition, historically formed, which schooling is aiming to address and thus teacher education must focus on building greater social justice through teaching. Other chapters assume this context without naming it, while referring more to diversity, identity and/or interdependence as ways to enter into understanding learners. For two chapters, post-apartheid is *embodied* in the PGCE programme through reflection on one’s own formation and its implications for teaching: Joorst (Chapter 5) as a teacher educator embodying the racialised ‘other’ relating to largely white students through his pedagogies; and Fataar and Feldman’s (Chapter 6) exemplars of student reflective writing assignments which name and contest ongoing racialised inequalities in daily life, including at the university itself.

The inequalities in even a basic level of schooling provision in South Africa are continually ‘present’ in the different chapters’ efforts to understand difference and diversity. The most common way of addressing this challenge is taken up through the exploration of ethics:

- ◀ the ethics of pre-service teachers’ ‘agency’ in teacher practice (Robinson),
- ◀ understanding healthy human development as social and inter-dependent – who our learners are and how we support their quest to become more human (Conradie),
- ◀ teaching pre-service teachers to undertake ethical reflection of self-formation in relation to historical, racialised institutions (Fataar & Feldman),
- ◀ integrating ethics into business studies as a way to problematise business practices for citizens (America),
- ◀ emphasising the importance of selecting curriculum knowledge of worth for the future (Botha), and
- ◀ the question of what sciences might contribute to a more just society (Edwards).

These ethical questions are much more than ‘professional ethics’. They insist on citizens, including student teachers, being able to explore ethics in practice as part of contributing to their society. The ethical responsibilities of teacher

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educators in developing those capacities themselves, through reflection and critique of their own practices, underpins each chapter. In making that effort public, bravely, the authors make it possible to engage in conversation to develop new practices for the university and in relation to teachers and schools.

Having made their reflections and curriculum work public, these teacher educators have opened up new questions, which need to be addressed together. Unpacking the systemic and structural in teacher education's daily practices (see Kemmis et al., 2017) requires further dialogue and expanded reflection. What is the next move for this faculty and its programme? In what follows, I take up the absent presences and the issues laid on the table to invite further exploration, particularly as they resonate with me as regular visiting scholar and as co-practitioner across the Indian Ocean.

(Post) apartheid

'Apartheid' and post-apartheid are rarely mentioned in the chapters. Rather they appear as both ever-present and assumed within the university and the schooling system. Does (post) apartheid need to be unpacked more explicitly in public? Or are the terms 'social justice' and 'diversity' enough to understand and develop emerging practices? Not being based in South Africa, I don't know. However, I would suggest that in the next phase of academic deliberation and sharing, it would be worth using these chapters to surface assumptions about the specifics of how a programme can grapple with 'post-apartheid'. Is there a shared view? The context is quite different now than in 1994, both for school teachers and universities. Does the positioning of the staff themselves make such conversations difficult? Is the tension across practices in different modules and disciplinary traditions helpful for helping pre-service teachers to achieve a more explicit understanding of teaching and education institutions? What could an Afrikaans-background university do differently in terms of knowledge selection and university pedagogies for its diverse students? How does that desired and (im)possible condition of post-apartheid make itself visible in the pedagogical practices and embodied presence of a teacher education programme? What is at stake for the diversely disciplined and diversely backgrounded academic staff? How does post-apartheid challenge how teacher education understands its formation and disciplinary heritage? What responsibility do teacher educators have in explicit theorising on decolonising and decoloniality? Beyond a 'mission statement' or 'values statement' for a programme, how does struggling with decoloniality enter into our daily teaching practice?

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In trying to unpack our work practices and identities in a colonised society, with the heavy burden of apartheid in the case of South Africa, amidst the multiple intertwined crises of capitalism, environment and the racialised, patriarchal nation state (Brennan, 2017), it is worth remembering that teacher education does carry forward all those contemporary and historical habits. They are inscribed in our own histories and careers, the institutions in which we are embedded and their artefacts, in our curriculum and pedagogies. Mostly we act both *within and against the grain*. The opportunity of reaccreditation of a programme has helped bring out what is at stake in the design and enactment of a programme, helping to question the very 'grain' itself. Every element of the 'grain' or 'grammar' of education institutions (Tyack & Tobin, 1994) has been infused with apartheid and colonial segregation legacies. It follows that the artefacts, the lecture theatres, statues and offices shape what is possible to do and imagine for teacher education curriculum and pedagogies. The knowledge-work – the content options and languages made available – have similar heritages, embedded in academic careers and qualifications, too, and academic identities. 'Reflection' is thus a heavily-laden term, one that calls for dialogue so that it is not accomplished in private but as part of the public shared work of a programme team.

South Africanising 'Productive Pedagogies'?

In grappling with the questions and starting points of their conversation, the second resource to open up dialogue among the academic faculty of the programme was that of the Productive Pedagogies. These are very familiar to me as the work derives from longitudinal study in Australian schools (Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard, 2006). Productive Pedagogies emphasises four dimensions of pedagogies, viz., intellectual quality, connectedness, a supportive classroom environment and working with and valuing difference. These specify pedagogical teaching and learning assemblages which produce greater access to the 'goods' of schooling for marginalised groups. Several of the chapters engaged with elements of these pedagogies, including the issue of substantive conversations necessary for intellectual quality; the significance of increasing diversity among the academic staff and the pre-service teaching body at Stellenbosch; how to build supportive learning environments based around understanding students; connectedness with the complexity of schools; and, the problem of professional placements.

Following up the Productive Pedagogies more explicitly within South African teacher education – exploring, analysing and developing pedagogies which build greater distribution of education for citizenship, participation and

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recognition – would be a major contribution to teacher education scholarship. It would have ramifications that challenge those university's pedagogies-as-usual that translate legacies of coloniality (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) which further seep into, and are too little problematised in schools.

Many of the modules have taken up the Productive Pedagogies challenge. In a number of chapters, the question of intellectual quality is foregrounded. Carina America (Chapter 7) raises questions about how to address business ethics in teacher education through substantive, intellectually rich and rigorous conversations, and how this focus might address a different orientation to business and business studies for future citizens. Marie Louise Botha (Chapter 4) problematises the selection of knowledge in Curriculum Studies, asking how growth of pre-service teachers' knowledge of education might itself contribute to new futures. Building epistemological dispositions through considering key concepts in education psychology is the challenge put forward by Karlien Conradie (Chapter 3), and Nazeem Edwards (Chapter 8) wants the science educators to be able to recontextualise science knowledges for greater student engagement.

Connectedness is considered in almost every chapter. Identities are relational; relationships – e.g. Jerome Joorst's troubling of the possibilities of respectful knowing between teacher educator and pre-service teacher – are central to teaching practice. Can a pre-service teacher get to know his world? The world of township students? Conradie's argument for relational interdependence as central to building good learning does require engagement with the big issues as experienced by those we teach. Health and economic issues associated with the current global pandemic – and the maldistribution of resources to deal with it – bring out the need for ensuring that pre-service teachers and teacher educators as citizens can not only understand their world but also are in a position to build agency to address issues as they are lived, as Maureen Robinson raises in relation to professional placements. 'Relevance' depends on knowledge and grows through action across relationships.

Valuing difference, the third productive pedagogy, remains a key focus for all chapters. Fataar and Feldman (Chapter 6) argue that learning to 'become' a teacher requires attention to students' own biographic histories and trajectories so that they will be able to treat these in relation to the biographies and trajectories of students and other teachers who may be quite different from themselves. Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2018) calls such work the refusal of the 'epistemicide' of colonialism, i.e. exclusion of knowledges other than the dominant Eurocentric; the work includes their retrieval and placement back into curriculum alongside other knowledges.

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The strangest aspect of teacher education at Stellenbosch University for me has been the lecture-based format for the core modules, with tutorials for these classes largely optional. Thus, 'discussion' in the compulsory modules means addressing issues in a large class (in the case of the PGCE, often more than 200 students) in a tiered lecture theatre. I find it difficult to imagine how the strong identity-shaping work of engaging and valuing difference or taking up lived issues in schools (which will be different to their own for the majority of students) can be underpinned without scheduled small tutorials for all groups. In such settings learning with and from each other can support work *against the grain*, with the emotional and intellectual embodiment required. The supportive classroom environment of Productive Pedagogies is thus a major challenge in which to build pedagogical practices in teacher education at the university and in partnership with school placements. Being electives, the subject-specific module groups are much smaller and there is more scope for social engagement; however, those teacher educators who are responsible for the core modules still try for substantive conversations in the lecture theatre; they try to make issues 'live' for pre-service teachers. Much of their creative pedagogical work lies in designing activities and assessments that support identity work and understanding of societal issues present in education institutions, as the chapters by Fataar and Feldman, Joorst and Edwards illustrate.

For me, from a settler-society where the colonial legacies of violence, patriarchy and 'epistemicide' continue to shape education institutions, the following questions arise when engaging with the Productive Pedagogies as a teacher educator:

- ◀ Is it possible to specify which pedagogies are 'productive' in teacher education classrooms in the very different and diverse nations of Australia/South Africa?
- ◀ How might pre-service teachers help to develop and document school pedagogic practices which produce greater access in Australia/South Africa?
- ◀ In what ways and around which concepts do pre-service teachers engage with intellectual quality in their study and practice of schooling and teaching?
- ◀ How does a teacher educator generate substantive conversations around key concepts pre-service teachers need to analyse and explain teaching, learning and schooling in South Africa at the current moment?
- ◀ How can university-based teacher education programme academics connect pre-service teachers with the social, political and economic issues that have and continue to shape their lives and the place of humans on the planet to inform the work of teaching?
- ◀ In building 'citizen-educators', how do teachers and teacher educators share that work with other citizens?

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- ◀ How can teacher educators retrieve and/or draw on knowledges and languages which have been 'invisibilised' from inclusion in university and school curricula?
- ◀ What might be the alliances with other countries that help other decolonialising practices for teacher education to emerge?
- ◀ What pedagogic strategies support teacher educators' connection with pre-service teachers, and among the student cohort, to build assets from their own diversities that underpin the dismantling of deficit pedagogy in schools and universities?
- ◀ In what ways might township and other marginalised communities and their agencies inform and shape teacher education programmes for the majority?

Such questions, and more, could form the basis of the next stage of debate, building shared research agendas in teacher education at Stellenbosch University. In teacher education we are supposed to 'know'. We are, however, only too well aware of what we don't know. Our task is to refuse the singular, reductionist recipe approach to knowledge and to build up knowledge for and from practice. Back in 1993, Wagner argued that research programmes have both blind spots and blank spots. A blank spot represents an area that is inadequately developed within an existing matrix of phenomena for investigation and key themes and conceptual foci for a discipline. For example, we may have learned a great deal about school access in urban areas but not have much study of whether access problems are similar or different in rural and remote areas. That blank spot on the research agenda matrix can be filled in, following similar methodologies, questions and issues, and may in turn add further dimensions to the original studies and their questions and findings. Blind spots, on the other hand, are those which our current methodologies and foci do not reveal, questions we have not asked nor even thought need to be asked.

The post-apartheid South Africa has necessarily forced teacher educators to address a number of blank spots and blind spots. Social, economic and political shifts have a history of doing that. Establishing an evolving research agenda through shared exploration of the design and conduct of a teacher education programme has rarely been achieved, particularly in countries where capitalist redistribution does not thrive. The 'matrix' of teacher education research has to move beyond a kind of universalist definition of current assumptions of the phenomena to be studied and the resources for studying them. The Covid-19 global pandemic is similarly raising issues into awareness so that new questions can be asked – not just of the political, economic and health systems, but also of teacher education. There are multiple ways in which blind spots can be surfaced, although there are often gatekeepers who make it difficult to ask new questions.

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A key way to bring blind spots to the surface is to borrow issues from other disciplines. Wagner terms this: “one discipline’s row, another’s column” in the research agenda matrix (1993:18). Zeichner (2007) understands that building knowledge across such studies opens up new questions for knowledge-in-practice, making possible new research agendas. By working from a group of studies, such as those represented in this book, it is possible that the book can become more than the sum of its parts, as single self-study cases. Represented in this book, and possibly more in its underpinning programme dialogic deliberations, are a diverse set of research methods and disciplinary orientations that can challenge one another’s blind spots – and in the process put new issues and practices for further research in teacher education. It may well be that a social psychologist’s orientation to identity can open up questions of social inter-dependence that allow new questions of the historian or the sociologist of education. ‘Racialisation’ processes are differently understood by literacy educators or environment and health educators. How do they come together to develop more inclusive research agendas for teacher education? It may be useful to examine debates in other former colonies’ societies to help bring out an explicit articulation of issues within a South African context such as among Canadian First Nations (Amsler, Kerr & Andreotti, 2020; Dénommé-Welch & Montero, 2014) or Maori experience in New Zealand (Smith & Smith, 2019), unpacking the materiality of practices in Tuck and Wang’s approach to decoloniality as “more than a metaphor” (2012:1).

The question facing the reader and the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University, now, is not so much ‘What can I learn from this book?’ – although there is much provoked by the different chapters – but more a question of: What can the authors teach us next? Yes, the teacher educators here have to do more work, as do we all. Taking up this challenge means engaging in further investigations, opening up one’s own identity and its historical trajectory to colleagues to enable a shared problematisation about both education and teacher education’s positioning in South Africa. That requires building a level of trust and knowledge of one another that is difficult to achieve. However, there is some dialogic history to build on, and further interrogate, together. Covid-19 adds even more urgency to this demand to open ourselves up to rethinking teacher education, teaching and learning, and schooling more generally. Future questions that arise from thinking of next steps across these chapters will deepen the conversations and deliberations among programme staff, inviting others – including myself – to pursue them further. Teacher education scholarship will be enriched, along with its practice. The next book should be even more brave.

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