Reforming the Reform of Teacher Education

A Critical Grounded Theory of a Social Approach to Change and Continuity

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents ..... **iii**
List of Tables and Figures ..... **vii**
Abstract ..... **ix**
Declaration ..... **xi**
List of Acronyms ..... **xv**

Chapter 1: Introduction **1**
The Regulation of Teacher Preparation in Queensland **5**
Regulating the Profession 5
Regulating Higher Education 8
The Growth of the Regulatory Climate 11
Reviewing Teacher Preparation **12**
The Caldwell and Sutton Review 13
Focussing the Study **19**

Chapter 2: The Contemporary Context of Teacher Preparation **25**
An Overview of Contemporary Teacher Preparation **25**
A Short History of Teacher Preparation in Australia **27**
The Apprenticeship Model 29
The Training Model 30
The Education Model 34
Questions that Emerge from the History of Teacher Preparation 38
Teacher Preparation Providers in the Australian Context **38**
Employer-Based Provision of Teacher Preparation 39
Independent Provision of Teacher Preparation 40
Questions that Emerge in Relation to Teacher Preparation Providers 41
Teacher Preparation Models in Contemporary Context **41**
The Regulation of Teacher Preparation in Australia 43
The Origins of the Regulatory Climate 47
Questions that Emerge in Considering the Contemporary Context 50
The Professional Identity of Teacher Educators **50**
The Academic Standing of Teacher Educators 51
Engaging the Work of the Academy 51
The Development of Scholarship and Research 53
Questions that Emerge about the Professional Identity of Teacher Educators 57
Reading The Story of Teacher Preparation Differently **57**
Philosophical Foundations for Alternative Readings 58
Knowledge and Power in the Provision of Teacher Preparation 60
The Research Question 62

Chapter 3: Methodology **65**
Elucidating the Foundations of Research/Inquiry **65**
A Four-Fold Philosophical Frame for Research 66
Engaging Critical Inquiry **69**
Exploring Methodological Possibilities **71**
Examining Grounded Theory **73**
The Origins of Grounded Theory 73

Interpretivist Grounded Theory 74
Postpositivist Grounded Theory 76
Constructivist Grounded Theory 76
Postmodern Grounded Theory 77
The Need for a Critical Grounded Theory 77
Elaborating Critical Grounded Theory 78
Developing Critical Grounded Theory 79
Enacting Critical Grounded Theory 83
Sequencing the Research Process in Critical Grounded Theory 85
Research Methods across the Phases of Critical Grounded Theory 86
Presenting the Outcomes of Critical Grounded Theory 98

Chapter 4: An Analysis of Narratives in the Story of Teacher Preparation 99
Constructing and Deconstructing the Narratives 99
The Continuity of Teacher Training in Victoria 100
The Foundations of Teacher Preparation in Victoria 101
Coping with Crisis – The Depression Years 104
The Outworking of the Exigencism of the Depression Years 105
Deconstructing the Victorian Story: Situational Analysis 107
Situational Mapping: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Context 107
Positional Mapping: Competing Perspectives in the Continuity of Teacher Training 112
The Rise of Teacher Education in Western Australia 115
The Foundations of Teacher Preparation in Western Australia 116
Coping with Crisis – Depression and War 119
The Outworking of the Exigencism of the Crisis Years 121
Deconstructing the Western Australia Story: Situational Analysis 124
Situational Mapping: Change and Continuity in the Western Australian Context 124
Positional Mapping: Competing Perspectives in the Development of Teacher Education 130
Critiquing the Narratives 135
Setting 135
Characters 137
Narrative Plots 138
Themes 141
Theorising from the Narratives 142

Chapter 5: Theorising from the Historical Context 145
Theorising Change and Continuity 145
The Social Process of Change and Continuity 149
Negotiation as the Core Variable in the Social Process 152
Category 1: Participants in Negotiation 154
Category 2: Negotiation Matrix 158
Category 3: The Practices of Negotiation 166
Drawing Theoretical Conclusions 171

Chapter 6: Theorising Change and Continuity in Contemporary Contexts 175
An Analysis of the Contemporary Interviews 176
Themes in the Interview Data 178
The Social Context of Change and Continuity 181

The Cultural Field of Education 186
The Political Field of Teacher Preparation 190
Reform as the Core Variable in the Social Context 202
Category 1: Purposes; Goals for the Educational Reform of Teacher Education 204
Category 2: Practices; Promoting Educational Reform of Teacher Education 210
Category 3: Principles; Applying Educational Reform to Teacher Education 221
Drawing Theoretical Conclusions 231

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations 237
Comparing Theoretical Outcomes 238
Comparing Core Conceptions 238
Theorising a Social Approach to Change and Continuity 241
Responding to the Research Question 244
Change in Teacher Education 244
Knowledge and Power in the Social Approach to Change and Continuity 246
Emerging Paradigms for Teacher Education 248
The Future of Teacher Education 250
Further Considerations 252
Issues in Teacher Education for Further Investigation 252
Methodological Issues for Further Consideration 254
Issues for Investigation beyond the Scope of this Study 255
Limitations of the Study 257
Hope for the Future of Teacher Education 259

Reference List 261
Legislation 282

Appendices 283
Appendix 1: Ethics Documentation 283
Appendix 2: Exemplar Memo – Phase Two Core Category: Negotiation 289
Appendix 3: Exemplar Memo – Interview Analysis 293
Category 1: The Political Field 294
Category 2: The Cultural Field 296
Category 3: Political - Cultural Interface 297
Category 4: Teacher Education for Building the Profession 299
Appendix 4: Exemplar Memo – Phase Three Category: Influences on the Field of Teacher Education 303
Political Influences on Teacher Education 303
Educational Influences on Teacher Education 310

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.1 Comparison of ATEA Conference Proceedings: 2012-2014 2
Figure 1.1 The Categorisation of Preservice Teacher Education Recommendations 15
Figure 1.2 Categorisation of Recommendations across Calwell and Sutton's (2010) Reports 16
Figure 1.3 Representation on Expert Panels 17
Figure 3.1. Model of an Authentic Paradigm of Inquiry 68
Figure 3.2. Framework of Paradigms for Social Research (adapted from Crotty 1998) 73
Figure 3.3 Methodological Sequence 85
Table 3.1. Key Historical Texts in Teacher Preparation 90
Table 3.2. Example of Initial and Focussed Coding of Interview Data 95
Figure 3.4. Example of Reflective Memo Using Writing Strategies 97
Figure 3.5. Example of Reflective Memo Using Brainstorming 97
Figure 4.1 The Victorian Context: Abstract Situational Map 108
Figure 4.2 Continuity of the Training Model: Abstract Situational Map 109
Figure 4.3 Core Contestation in the Continuity of Teacher Training: Abstract Positional Map 113
Figure 4.4 The Western Australian Context: Abstract Situational Map 125
Figure 4.5 The Rise of Teacher Education: Abstract Situational Map 126
Figure 4.6 Core Contestation in the Rise of Teacher Education: Abstract Positional Map 131
Figure 5.1 Change and Continuity as a Social Process: A Theoretical Model 150
Figure 5.2 Classification of Participants in the Social Process of Change and Continuity 155
Figure 5.3 The Negotiation Matrix 158
Figure 5.4 Conceptions of Influence in the Social Process of Change and Continuity 159
Figure 5.5 Types of Hope for the Future of Teacher Preparation 168
Figure 6.1 Two Exemplar Conceptual Models from Contemporary Interviews 177
Figure 6.2 Change and Continuity for Preferred Futures in Teacher Education 182
Figure 6.3 Practices Promoting Educational Reform in Teacher Education 211
Figure 6.4 The Structure of Human Activity (Engeström, 1987, p.78) 234
Table 6.1 The Core Elements of Human Activity in the Reform of Teacher Education 235
Figure 7.1 Core Conceptions of Theoretical Models: Phase 2 and 3 239
Figure 7.2 A Social Approach to Change and Continuity 242

ABSTRACT

The reform of teacher education in Australia has been an issue of significant challenge to higher education providers in recent decades. The granting of autonomy to state-based teachers' colleges in 1972 heralded in a supposed era of autonomous university level teacher education as an exclusive model of teacher preparation. Subsequently, the context of teacher education has been in an almost constant cycle of political review and reform. Across the period of this study, 2010-2015, the pace of these cycles has increased to the point where the the outworking of one review has not been completed before the next wave of actions are rolled out. One notable example being the release of the second iteration of the *National Program Standards* for initial teacher education courses in December 2015 (AITSL, 2015). Considering the length of an undergraduate initial teacher education course and the time taken in accrediting a course, the review and reform of the first iteration of the program standards, released for commencement in 2012, has come before any evidence of their usefulness could ever be collected. In the climate of review and regulation that has taken hold, the impact of political intervention on the processes and practices of teacher education is significant.

The outworking of political review and reform is experienced by teacher education as change and continuity. While change and continuity are often described as externalised abstract conceptions, the thesis developed from this study has identified change and continuity as subjective, contextualised social processes. From this perspective, it is argued that change and continuity are the key means that individuals, institutions and organisations engage in seeking to improve or develop teacher education and its outcomes towards a preferred future. Given the multiplicity of voices consistently present in the practice of teacher education, the reform of teacher education through the outworking of change and continuity has always been a deeply political activity. As such, the core issue facing teacher educators is finding the space to be both heard and heeded amongst the cacophony of voices that have influence in political review and reform processes.

A critical grounded theory methodology was designed for this study into the political practices surrounding the reform of teacher education. In doing so, it specifically employed two core purposes identified from the integration of critical theory with grounded theory. These were to; critically analyse the knowledge and power relations at work in the political practices of reform, and to consider emancipatory possibilities for teacher educators. With this in mind, the methods employed gave purposeful voice to teacher educators through historical texts written by and contemporary interviews conducted with teacher educators. Two substantive theoretical models emerged from the critical analysis of the data. These models highlighted the; nature of the social process of change and continuity evident in the historical context of teacher preparation in Australia, and importance of the local social context of change and continuity across contemporary international teacher education.

The conclusions drawn from this study have used a comparative analytical process to theorise a social approach to change and continuity. The thesis presented is that the outworking of reform towards educationally justifiable outcomes is predicated upon the employment of educational voices in socially mediated decision-making processes. For social engagement in the political practices of reform to be successful, teacher educators need to foster carefully nuanced relationships, provide clear and purposeful communication, and maintain a positive psychological disposition. It is argued that the future of teacher education and its potential to impact the professionalisation of teachers is entirely dependent upon the capacity of teacher educators learning to productively occupy the space available for their voice in the political context of reform.

DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Signed: Date: 31 May 2016

A task, such as the completion of a thesis of this nature, is never the work of just one person. While I have actually written everything that is included herein, there are many others who have made significant contributions and deserve honourable mention. I know I run the risk of missing someone important off the list, nevertheless I would like to thank…

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AARE	Australian Association for Research in Education
ACDE	Australian Council of Deans of Education
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACP	Australian Council of Professions
AEEYSOC	Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leadership
APJTE	*Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*
APST	Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AQFC	Australian Qualifications Framework Council
ARC	Australian Research Council
ATEA	Australian Teacher Education Association
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
BTE	Board of Teacher Education
BTR	Board of Teacher Registration
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DET(Austl.)	Department of Education and Training (Australian Government)
DET(Qld)	Department of Education and Training (Queensland Government)
ERA	Excellence in Research for Australia
ERP	Education Research and Perspectives
HESF	Higher Education Standards Framework
ISI	Institute for Scientific Information
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NPQTL	National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSQT	Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers
QCAA	Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority
QCT	Queensland College of Teachers
QOHE	Queensland Office of Higher Education
SCEVT	Standing Committee in Education and Vocational Training
SCSEEC	Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood
TEMAG	Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
TQELT	Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce