Teachers and Teaching
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713447546

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Online Publication Date: 01 April 2009

To cite this Article Berry, Amanda(2009)'Professional self-understanding as expertise in teaching about teaching', Teachers and Teaching, 15:2, 305 — 318
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/13540600902875365
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540600902875365

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Professional self-understanding as expertise in teaching about teaching
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(Received 16 September 2008; final version received 7 January 2009)

This paper explores an aspect of the knowledge of teaching required by teacher educators and how that knowledge might be developed if teaching (about teaching) is to be conceptualised as a distinct and important field in its own right – with its own forms of knowledge, ways of working and perspectives on the world. The paper focuses on self-understanding as a component of teacher educators’ knowledge of practice and examines how the development of self-understanding can be conceived as a form of teacher educator expertise. Few studies have explicitly considered teacher educators’ self-understanding as a form of professional knowledge; hence, this article makes a contribution to explicating and documenting this aspect of teacher educators’ practice.

Keywords: teacher education; learning about teaching; discipline of teaching; self-study; pedagogy of teacher education

Introduction

The development of professional self-understanding as a form of expertise matters in teacher education because as more finely nuanced understandings of self are developed and elaborated, these in turn shape the way in which practice is enacted and understood (by oneself and other teacher educators) and how it is experienced and interpreted by students of teaching. In the first part of this paper, some of the relevant literature is discussed, while the second part of the paper explores these ideas through the context of my own investigation (a self-study) into the professional self-understanding I have developed as a teacher educator. The paper concludes with a discussion of how self-understanding as a form of professional knowledge might contribute to a discipline of teaching.

Conceptual framework

Preparation of teacher educators

The preparation of teacher educators and the development of their knowledge of teaching about teaching is an area of research that for a considerable period of time has received scant attention (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; Lanier & Little, 1986), although this situation is beginning to change (Murray, 2008). One reason to account for the paucity of research in this area is that knowledge of teaching about teaching...
has not been regarded as a form of specialised expertise within academia (when compared with other disciplinary fields such as science, mathematics or history) – a situation that is linked to notions of teaching itself as an under-theorised field (Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, & Wubbels, 2001).

Many teacher educators are former, often highly successful, classroom teachers. As classroom teachers they bring particular knowledge, experience, beliefs and values to their new role, developed primarily through their interactions in schools. These aspects of their teacher role carry a sense of credibility in their work in teacher education, particularly in the eyes of their student teachers. However, although their ability as good practitioners can be an entry point to teacher education, a paradox emerges. The role of teacher educator demands a focus on knowledge about, and learning of, teaching in new and different ways such that expertise as a teacher can in fact have limited applicability in practice as a teacher educator. For instance, many new teacher educators quickly learn that the knowledge they bring (typically in the form of stories, activities and classroom routines) cannot ‘simply’ be transferred into the thinking and actions of their student teachers – a situation that often challenges new teacher educators’ sense of identity as competent professionals (Murray & Male, 2005). The knowledge required by teacher educators is also, in many ways, far more extensive than that required of schoolteachers, since teacher educators must know not only about their subject discipline, school aged learners and schooling, but also about how student teachers learn and develop and strategies for assisting student teachers in the processes of their professional growth (Swennen, Volman, & van Essen, 2008). Hence, there are significant challenges associated with the role of teacher educator that are different from school teaching in learning how to understand, effectively use and develop knowledge of practice in ways that can support student teachers’ learning about teaching.

The task for teacher educators is made even more demanding due to the fact that there is little, if any, formal preparation for their role; nor is there much in the way of ongoing professional support or mentoring (Lunenberg, 2002; Zeichner, 2005).

**Nature of teaching as complex and problematic**

Developing one’s knowledge as a teacher educator is complex and personally demanding (see e.g. Berry, 2004a, 2004b; Bullough, 1997; Dinkelman, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006). This is due, in part, to the messy and unpredictable nature of teaching itself that requires substantial knowledge, experience and judgement that can be drawn upon ‘within the moment’ of teaching, and partly also because the nature of teaching about teaching demands even more sophisticated understandings of practice (Loughran, 2007) since the teacher educator is required to both recognise and productively manage this complexity within her own practice while, at the same time, support new teachers to do the same in theirs. This is not easy task, as Kelchtermans (2005, p. 998) observes: ‘In spite of thoughtful planning and purposeful skilled action … the “pedagogical”; relationship can never be fully controlled, nor can one be sure that one’s actions will convey the meaning they were intended to have for students’.

Recognising the unpredictable and problematic nature of teaching and finding ways of representing these aspects of teaching to student teachers in ways that might help them begin to see and manage these complexities for themselves is a difficult job for teacher educators. Much of what comprises the problematic is not easily seen or understood since it lies beneath the apparently smooth surface of teaching.
Loughran, Berry, Clemans, Lancaster, and Long (2008) propose that a characteristic of the ‘truly expert’ teacher educator is one who not only possesses a deep understanding of the ‘hidden’ or tacit dimensions of teaching, but also, one who can make explicit those deep understandings of practice in ways that encourage articulation by others.

**Nature of teacher educator expertise**

In a recent theme issue of *Teaching and Teacher Education* focussing on the expertise of teacher educators, Korthagen, Loughran, and Lunenburg (2005) identified two major perspectives in conceptualising teacher educator expertise: the ‘big picture’ perspective, concerned with broad issues related to the knowledge, skills and competencies of teacher educators, and exemplified through research into standards for teacher educators (see, e.g. Koster, Brekelmans, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 2005; Smith, 2005), and a more specific perspective based on teacher educators’ ‘specific expertise in particular situations’ (Korthagen et al., 2005, authors’ italics, p. 113). This second perspective is illustrated through examples of teacher educators’ everyday practice and is typically highlighted through the ‘complex dual role’ (p. 113) that teacher educators play as models of teaching as well as teaching their students about teaching (see Loughran & Berry, 2005; Willemse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2005).

Although these two perspectives focus on different aspects of teacher educators’ expertise, they are also interconnected as the more generalised skills, knowledge and attitudes that comprise the ‘big picture’ perspective play out within specific, real-world situations of the teacher education classroom.

While in recent times, views of that which constitutes professional expertise have varied considerably, a consistent aspect of the notion of expertise includes a professional knowledge component that encompasses both a tacit as well as an explicit knowledge dimension (Eraut, 1994). Tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967), or that ‘we know but cannot tell’ is complex and personal, developed through experience and demonstrated to be difficult for individuals to access and articulate due to its deeply embedded nature.

Teachers’ professional knowledge has long been recognised as largely tacit (Loughran, 2007; Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001). Teachers are not used to articulating their knowledge of practice: they are more in a ‘doing’ environment, than in a ‘knowing’ environment (Clandinin, 1986; Eraut, 1994). The isolated nature of teaching, perpetuated by a limited emphasis on teachers collaborating and developing their professional knowledge of practice (within schools and systems of education), has further contributed to this situation. Consequently, developing a shared knowledge base seems to be more problematic for teachers than might be the case for professionals in other fields.

For teacher educators, a problem emerges because an important aspect of their work involves making explicit to student teachers the tacit components of practice (Smith, 2005). Yet, as noted earlier, to do so is complex and difficult, since teacher educators themselves may not ‘know what they know’ at a conscious level and may have had few experiences of articulating their knowledge of practice either for themselves or others. Added to this, teacher educators may feel hesitant to publicly articulate their personal understandings of practice because to do so may conflict with their views of supporting student teachers in developing their own understandings of teaching and learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999), or putting established theory into practice.
Such feelings of conflict between personally developed knowledge generated through experience and, abstract, theoretical knowledge is characteristic of the much cited theory-practice tension (Bromme & Tillema, 1995) that is commonly cited as pervading the professions.

Nevertheless, being able to examine and articulate personal understandings of pedagogy developed through experience is important for teacher educators in building their professional knowledge of practice and developing meaningful ways of supporting the learning and development of their student teachers. Teacher educators need to be able to question the underpinning values, assumptions and beliefs that inform their teaching and challenge the taken-for-granted aspects (Shön, 1992) of practice – which may well be working against their intentions for their students’ learning (Brookfield, 1995). They also need to be able to articulate these inquiry processes and understandings in ways that are accessible for their student teachers so that they might begin to recognise the complex nature of teaching and learning, and feel encouraged to examine these aspects of practice for themselves.

The ability to interrogate personal understandings of practice in ways that provide insight into alternative perspectives of situations (that is, the ability to ‘frame’ and ‘reframe’ practice [Schön, 1983, 1987]), and to begin to articulate new understandings in ways that promote changed practice in oneself and others could well be described (and expected) as components of the expertise required of teacher educators in purposefully connecting the two perspectives (‘big picture’ and specific) identified above.

Recognising the problematic, questioning routine situations and making meaning from experience in ways that enhance understandings of one’s professional practice is characterised as reflection (Loughran, 2002; Schön, 1983, 1987). Reflection encompasses more than a set of skills and knowledge, it also calls on particular dispositions (personal qualities) that include: open mindedness to seeing problems within one’s own practice; willingness to open one’s practice up for scrutiny; as well as, preparedness to take risks and expose oneself as vulnerable (Berry, 2007).

For teacher educators, reflection carries a dual purpose since it is both personally relevant, as a means of gaining insight into experience, and a capacity to be developed in student teachers. The acquisition of expertise as a teacher educator therefore, means building, and being able to draw upon, increasingly sophisticated understandings of reflection, in ways that make the ideas clear, explicit and applicable in teaching about teaching (Berry & Loughran, 2002).

**Self-awareness and self-understanding**

The process of reflection can be viewed as one that supports and values ongoing professional learning and helps individuals to construct their professional knowledge of practice. Through reflection, a deeper understanding of the self – including how one acts, what one knows and does not know, strengths and weaknesses and gaps between what one says and does – can be developed. Clearly, the development of such self-knowledge is important if teacher educators (and their student teachers) are to connect in authentic ways and lead to learning being experienced as a meaningful process (Dirkx, 2006; Palmer, 1998).

Building professional knowledge involves acquiring both self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-knowledge encompasses a broad field that includes knowledge of one’s own knowledge and skills, and of how one learns (Eraut, 1994). Self-awareness,
on the other hand, is associated with a state of being, whereby one is ‘awake … [and in] a positive state of heightened awareness and sensitivity to what is happening’ (Mason, 2002, pp. 223–224) such that one is able to ‘monitor actions at a conscious intellectual level’ (Macleod & Cowieson, 2001, p. 242). Self-awareness goes beyond an everyday level of conscious awareness of one’s actions and interactions and includes an understanding of how one typically acts or is perceived by others in particular situations (Korthagen, 2004).

The development of professional self-awareness, that is the ability to reflect on and assess one’s behaviours and actions in a professional practice context, is an important goal of teacher education since it helps to monitor and inform teachers’ pedagogic actions; yet it could well be argued that it is rarely addressed in a purposeful and organised way in teacher education programmes. Possibly, this is due to the complex and largely tacit nature of this type of knowledge that makes it difficult to explain and teacher educators may lack strategies for knowing how they might develop self-awareness in themselves or their student teachers. In addition, the personal nature of knowing about one’s self may be misunderstood (by both student teachers and teacher educators) and be interpreted as somehow less relevant or valuable (to learn about) compared with learning about established educational theories and practices. One effect of neglecting to attend to the explicit development of self-awareness may be that the quality of pedagogical interactions is diminished as teachers in both higher education and schools may fail to recognise the ways in which their own beliefs, goals, values and experiences impact on teaching and learning situations.

Over time, self-understanding is developed from self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-understanding is the accumulated wisdom that comes from sustained reflective thinking (Hunt, 1987) and includes such things as, for example, one’s strengths, weaknesses, needs, emotions and drives. Self-understanding also refers to a recognition of how past experiences and current situations influence how one views oneself as a professional (London, 2001).

Kelchtermans (2005) identified self-understanding as one of two interconnected components of a broader framework – a personal interpretive framework – which functions as a lens through which teachers perceive of, give meaning to, and act in their role. According to Kelchtermans, self-understanding in the context of teaching is ‘dynamic and biographical’ (p. 1000) in its nature and hence should be understood as both product and process, that is, as ‘the understanding one has of one’s “self” at a certain moment in time (product) as well as … [the] process of making sense of one’s experiences and their impact on the “self”’ (p. 1000, author’s italics).

Kelchtermans emphasises the construction of the word in Dutch (his first language of writing) as important to its meaning since professioneel zelfverstaan comprises both a noun and a verb – the process of constructing the self and the outcome of doing so. He contends that self-understanding is achieved only through the act of ‘telling’ (p. 1000), that is, in making explicit to oneself or others, personally developed understandings of practice.

**Self-study: a tool for the development of self-understanding**

Self-study (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998) offers an approach to the development of self-understanding in education that involves reflection, framing and reframing. Self-study researchers draw on the processes of biography and reflection to bring to
light and examine assumptions underlying their practice and how these assumptions influence their pedagogical interactions.

The purpose of self-study is to develop deeper understandings of practice and to enhance the quality of students’ learning (Loughran, 2004). Through identifying the ‘interpretive frames’ (Barnes, 1992, p. 10) that guide their work, self-study researchers strive to understand their practice differently and to derive new meaning from it by drawing on alternative interpretations through reframing practice; thus offering new possibilities for more informed teaching.

The notion of reframing links self-study to Kelchtermans’ concept of self-understanding, i.e., as process (the act of reframing) and product (reframed practice). Self-understanding developed through self-study enhances the possibility that one’s actions achieve their intended effect.

Self-study, as a sophisticated form of practitioner research, draws on data sources that are appropriate to examining the issues, problems or dilemmas that are of concern to the educator within the practice context. It therefore serves as a powerful tool for uncovering important facets of the knowledge of practice (Loughran, 2005) and, at the same time, knowledge of self. Self-study is a unique form of research that is responsive to the demands of the practice context. Insights are derived from teaching that lead to shifts in the research focus and, in turn, give rise to other insights. New possibilities emerge and actions over time are constantly changing in response to the changing context (Loughran, 1999).

For teacher educators, self-study offers a means of making the tacit explicit and articulating the personal practical knowledge associated with teaching about teaching. Importantly, self-study can yield knowledge of practice that goes beyond everyday experience and connect with broader concerns and issues in teaching about teaching (Dinkelman, 2003), for example, in supporting the growth of student teachers who are reflective and self-directed professional learners. Professional self-understanding can be understood as an aspect of teacher educator expertise that is shaped and reshaped through the process of self-study.

In the first part of this paper, I have discussed, from a theoretical point of view, the nature of knowledge required by teacher educators, including the concept of self-understanding as a component of such knowledge. The following section draws on research from a longitudinal self-study of my practice as a teacher educator and examines the development of my self-understanding and the impact of that self-understanding on my knowledge and practice as a teacher educator.

**Researching my practice as a teacher educator: self-understanding through understanding practice**

As a beginning teacher educator, I soon came to learn that the professional knowledge I had developed in my former role as a high school teacher was limited in terms of enacting a pedagogy of teacher education (Russell & Loughran, 2007). The realisation that I could not simply transfer that which I knew into the new (teacher education) context and into the minds of the student teachers in my classes, created a stimulus for the self-study of my practice. Through embarking on a self-study I became eager to learn about how to better understand and develop my practice as a teacher educator, so that, in turn, I might more effectively support the growth and learning of new teachers. Hence, my self-study became a tool to support the development of my professional self-understanding. The major focus of my study was concerned with articulating,
documenting and analysing my experiences as a biology teacher educator as I learnt
to teach prospective biology teachers about teaching biology.

**Data sources**

Formal data collection took place over one academic year with the preservice teachers
in my biology methods class \(N = 28\) at a large Australian metropolitan university.
(Permission to conduct the study and procedures for inviting student participation
were approved by the university’s Human Research Ethics Committee.) A compre-
hensive array of data sources was chosen as a means for me to closely examine my
practice through a range of different perspectives. These data sources included:

- a written autobiographical account of my experiences as a teacher and learner;
- videotape of my biology methods classes (36 hours over two semesters);
- my journal;
- my field notes;
- a colleague’s observation of several of my biology methods classes;
- student-teacher assignments from the class;
- interviews conducted twice during the year with a small cohort (eight) of the
  biology student-teachers; and
- email correspondence with one student teacher over the academic year about our
  individual and shared experiences of teaching and learning biology (Berry,
  2004a).

**Beginning a process of self-understanding**

One of my initial goals in framing the self-study was to consider the alignment
between my actions and intentions as a teacher educator, and to uncover some of the
assumptions I held about teaching and learning as well as ways in which these
assumptions played out in my practice. I began my study by articulating a set of ques-
tions about my teaching in relation to this broad goal.

My questions emerged through analysis of an autobiographical account I had
prepared of my ‘self’ as a teacher and a learner. For example, one of the guiding ques-
tions that surfaced through this process was: ‘What explicit and implicit messages
about learners and learning do I convey through the manner in which I conduct biology
methods classes? And, Are these messages consistent with those that I wish to develop
in my students?’ (see Berry, 2007, p. 3, for full set of questions).

Writing about and researching my practice using these questions as an initial frame
stimulated a process of change in my understandings of practice and consequently
my approach to research. For instance, I began to notice aspects of my practice as
‘problematic’, rather than my previous view as ‘simply’ a set of problems to solve.
Recognition of the problematic in situations led me to being able to probe those prob-
lematic aspects more fully in order to learn about how they impacted the teaching/learning
relationship. This shift in understanding can be understood as a signpost of
my developing self-understanding (as product) through the process of making sense
of my experiences (Keltchermans, 2005). My initial questions about my practice could
be considered as my first formal efforts in the process of self-understanding.

Ongoing analysis of my practice developed simultaneously with a review of the
research published by other teacher educators who were also motivated to study their
practice (see Berry, 2004b). I came to recognise similarities between my own experiences and those that these teacher educators reported from their practice. I also saw a broad framework that connected these elements of teacher educators’ practice. It was apparent that teacher educators regularly experienced particular tensions as they attempted to manage complex and conflicting pedagogical and personal dilemmas within their work as teachers of prospective teachers. The notion of tensions offered a useful way of describing teacher educators’ experiences of practice (including my own). Tensions captured well the feelings of internal turmoil experienced by teacher educators as they found themselves pulled in different directions by competing pedagogical demands and the difficulties they experienced as they learnt to recognise and manage the various dilemmas of practice.

As I engaged in the process of analysing my practice through the frame of tensions, I came to better understand my knowledge of practice in a more explicit and tangible form through these tensions and therefore became better able to articulate it. I became more confident in my understanding of the process of analysis and more familiar with the themes and patterns that were emerging through this newly conceptualised frame. As a consequence of seeing practice as a process of identifying and managing tensions, I took myself to new levels of understanding about, and articulation of, my practice. For example, the question that I identified early in my study about the explicit and implicit messages that I conveyed through my teaching approach (above), could be understood within the tension of ‘action and intent’; whereby the approaches chosen by teacher educators to bring about change in their practice and realise particular goals for their student teachers’ learning can be inadvertently undermined by the means in which they choose to achieve these goals. A list of the tensions that I identified and a brief explanation of each now follows (for a fuller description, see Berry, 2007).

Tensions
Tensions focus on the following areas and are expressed in terms of binaries in order to capture the sense of conflicting purpose and ambiguity held within each. Although presented as a list, they do not represent a hierarchy.

1. **Telling and growth** is embedded in teacher educators’ learning how to balance their desire to tell prospective teachers about teaching and providing opportunities for prospective teachers to learn about teaching for themselves.
2. **Confidence and uncertainty** is a tension experienced by teacher educators as they move away from the confidence of established approaches to teaching to explore new, more uncertain approaches to teacher education.
3. **Action and intent** arises from discrepancies between goals that teacher educators set out to achieve in their teaching and the ways in which these goals can be inadvertently undermined by the actions chosen to attain them.
4. **Safety and challenge** (named by Korthagen et al., 2001, p. 75) comes from teacher educators engaging students in forms of pedagogy intended to challenge and confront thinking about teaching and learning, and pushing students beyond the climate of safety necessary for learning to take place.
5. **Valuing and reconstructing experience** is embedded in the teacher educator’s role of helping prospective teachers recognise the value of personal experience in learning to teach, yet at the same time, helping them to see that there is more to teaching than simply acquiring experience.
(6) Planning and being responsive emerges from difficulties associated with implementing a predetermined curriculum and responding to learning opportunities that arise within the context of practice.

Recognising and conceptualising practice as tensions helped me to see the larger concerns I faced in teaching about teaching (e.g. that my intentions for student teachers’ learning led me to enact particular behaviours that may have been at odds with these intentions), as well as offering me a lens through which I could recognise particular aspects of my behaviours as a teacher educator, and insights into how others perceived my actions. Through the analysis of each tension then, particular aspects of my self-understanding came to light.

Tensions as a frame for developing professional self-understanding
I now discuss some examples from the tensions (above), the associated self-understanding that emerged for me, and the subsequent impact of my growing self-understanding on my practice.

Telling and growth
In developing my understanding of the tension of ‘telling and growth’, I came to recognise that my inexperience in the role of teacher educator coupled with my desire to enact a particular transformative approach to teacher education, led me to act according to a binary (either-or) view of the world. That is, I found myself either telling prospective biology teachers in my classes what I felt they needed to know about teaching (a transmissive approach) or completely withdrawing my authority as a ‘teller’ in order that student teachers could develop their own ways of working as new teachers. My dualistic ideas kept me to a fairly rigid and simplistic script about how I should behave as a teacher educator. However, as my confidence and experience in the role of teacher educator developed, supported through the study of my practice, so too did my ability to operate in a more flexible manner, so that I was able to recognise that a ‘both-and’ approach was possible, even desirable in teaching about teaching. My growing self-understanding about how my beliefs influenced my behaviour then freed me to begin to consider how I might behave differently, and how the effect of my actions may have impacted the learners in my classes. (For example, some students had expressed confusion and/or anger towards me that I had neglected to tell them what they felt they needed to know about teaching.) In turn, my self-understanding also gave rise to possibilities for me to recognise similar behaviours in my student teachers as they began to enact their approaches to teaching; so the self-knowledge developed began to impact practice in a variety of ways.

Action and intent
Through investigating the tension of ‘action and intent’ within my practice, I came to recognise some of my deeply held assumptions about learning. For instance, I assumed that all preservice teachers in my classes were keen to learn about teaching (they were not) and that their needs and concerns were similar to the ones I had faced as a new teacher (this assumption was also unfounded). The way in which
I planned the biology methods course, whereby a major component was devoted to peer teaching, was also based on an assumption – that is, the student teachers can learn about teaching more powerfully and effectively from critiquing each others’ teaching than supplying pre-prepared activities, or directing their learning myself. I considered that through collaboratively examining each other’s teaching the student teachers could begin to better understand and appreciate differences between the teacher’s and the learners’ perspectives. However, I came to learn that the approach I took in conducting the peer teaching and debriefing, was in fact, undermining my own efforts to support student teachers’ learning due to my unrealistic expectations of student teachers’ capacities for self-analysis and collaborative learning, and their willingness to expose their hesitations and concerns in front of their peers. I had a clear vision of what I intended student teachers to learn through peer teaching and found myself steering them towards my goals more than recognising and responding to that which emerged for them through the sessions. A clear discrepancy surfaced between my intention for student teachers’ learning and my actions and so highlighted aspects of my teacher educator behaviour that, through close analysis, led to deeper self-understanding.

Sometimes my lack of awareness about the ways I was behaving left me unaware that I was unwittingly sabotaging my own goals. This was highlighted for me particularly through practices I employed that reinforced assumptions about how students should behave with me … Clarifying these as problems then revealed the inner tension that was operating for me. (Berry, 2007, p. 95)

Developing awareness of my actions as a teacher educator, including the different ways in which my actions were being experienced and perceived by student-teachers and others (e.g. colleague observation of my classes) guided me towards more finely tuned self-understanding that in turn, led to more informed action, as I considered what I wished to achieve and possible alternative approaches to achieving my goals. For example, from time to time I began to recognise within the teaching moment particular feelings of frustration when my goals were not being met and as a consequence I learnt to stop and think for a moment (Mason, 2002) to consider how I might pay closer attention to my students’ needs and concerns rather than my own. However, achieving this state of conscious awareness of my actions, particularly within the moment of action, and being able to articulate these actions and possible alternatives to student teachers required considerable practice and skill; needless to say, that is a major and ongoing part of my work as a teacher educator.

**Learning about my ‘self’ through developing my self-understanding and self-awareness**

Learning about my ‘self’ through developing my self-awareness and self-understanding has been a prerequisite to helping others see themselves in ways that enable them to help themselves (just as I have learnt to do). Through the preparation and analysis of my biography I came to recognise the ways in which I had constructed myself as a received knower and the subsequent difficulties I faced as I attempted to understand teaching, and teacher education as uncertain and problematic. Framing my practice as tensions helped me better understand myself as a teacher educator struggling with dilemmas. Reframing my pedagogy as a series of tensions to be managed served as evidence to me that I had moved beyond a received knower approach and begun
to develop deeper levels of self-understanding. Through the extensive self-study I conducted, I also come to recognise some of the ways in which my self-growth had been stifled by my previous concrete and dualistic ways of thinking and acting.

Feelings of anxiety, lack of confidence and perceiving situations as ‘either-or’ binaries are situations also experienced by student teachers as they prepare to face new and challenging situations (Hinchman & Oyler, 2000). Through learning about these feelings for myself I am now more sensitive to the ways in which such feelings manifest and stifle growth in student teachers. Although I strived to do so previously in my practice, I have learnt that there is an important difference between being (and appearing) vulnerable to one’s own emotions and finding ways of disclosing one’s emotional state so as to facilitate learning for one’s self and others. Growth in self-understanding has led to growth in my confidence as a teacher educator and in my relationships with student teachers.

The process of articulating my knowledge of practice as a set of interconnected tensions has also highlighted the importance of particular personal qualities required by teacher educators that, I suggest, operate across the tensions. These personal qualities include:

- A capacity to sensitively tune into the needs of individual students (even when students may be unaware of or unable to articulate these needs for themselves. This is only possible when one can distinguish between one’s own needs and those of others).
- An ability to distinguish between different kinds of learning opportunities (including distinguishing between the teacher educator’s needs for student teachers’ learning and student teachers’ needs for their own learning).
- A genuine preparedness to share intellectual control.
- Trust in oneself and one’s students.
- A willingness to take risks and expose oneself as vulnerable.
- Capacity to explicitly model the above aspects in one’s practice.

Expertise as a teacher educator is developed as these aspects (above) are developed and better understood.

The development of self-understanding through self-study is ongoing, complex and demanding work. Uncovering deeply held assumptions about practice is a challenging task because an individual’s patterns of behaviour, particularly those long-held and deeply engrained behaviours, can be hard to uncover and resistant to examination. This means that learning can, at times, be slow to emerge as the construction of knowledge is both continuous and evolutionary. The personal demands associated with scrutinising one’s experiences, beliefs and practices are also significant since it requires considerable courage, effort and persistence to publicly open up one’s practice for examination. Yet, the difficult nature of such work is important if the knowledge and expertise developed is to be considered scholarship and contribute to a knowledge base on which teaching might claim to have something serious to offer – especially so in relation to issues of teaching as a field of study, or discipline.

**Conclusion**

The continuing development of teacher educators’ self-understanding has important consequences for the nature of teacher educator expertise because, as more finely
nuanced understandings of oneself and one’s practice are developed and elaborated, these in turn shape the way in which practice is enacted and understood (by oneself and other teacher educators) and how it is experienced and interpreted by students of teaching.

The development of professional self-understanding is an ongoing process – more than that, I propose that it should be the major professional activity of teacher educators – because the knowledge developed forms (and informs) teacher educators’ knowledge of practice. If arguments about the status of teaching – and by extension that of teaching about teaching – are to encompass notions of teaching as a discipline, then the nature of knowledge development and use is crucial and, personal self-understanding comprises part of that knowledge. As this paper has illustrated, my view of professional self-understanding is that it:

- can be developed through self-study;
- requires particular teacher educator personal qualities (willingness to see practice as problematic, to take risks and expose vulnerability, etc.);
- opens up new possibilities to think and act differently within practice; and
- involves developing self-awareness through understanding experience.

The aim of this paper was to contribute to a conceptualisation of expertise in teacher educator professional knowledge that includes the personal professional dimension of self-understanding through setting out both a rationale and example from my own self-study research. This paper puts forward one way of considering that which might comprise the next step towards conceptualising teaching as something more serious, more involved and more complex than is often the case when teaching is pejoratively spoken about as the simple act of doing. If teaching is to be considered a discipline it must involve elaborating aspects of a body of knowledge that directly informs the work of that field, in both practical and theoretical ways (Donaldson & Crowley, 2002). Such a discipline, if elaborated and shared, matters in the development of teacher educators and is crucial to improving the quality of teacher education.

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