2 Building professionals and elevating the profession?  
The work of university-based initial teacher educators in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Introduction

In this chapter we ask how institutional constructions of university-based teacher educators in Aotearoa New Zealand may support the development of preservice teachers as emerging professionals, thus contributing to aspirational and elevated understandings of teaching as a profession. Currently the majority of New Zealand’s primary and secondary initial teacher education (ITE) is situated in universities; however, this is not yet the case for early childhood education (ECE). In our discussion, we offer a short history of ITE in New Zealand, a brief analysis of how policy has shaped provision, a summary of the way teacher educators work is constructed from the Work of Teacher Educators–New Zealand research project (WoTE-NZ) and a discussion of the significance of our findings in regard to supporting the development of professional teachers and enhancing teaching as a profession.

We are a small grant-funded research team representing two major New Zealand universities. Prior to serving as university-based teacher educators we practised as teachers. Our shared experience comprises early childhood, primary and secondary teaching.

Zeichner (2006, p.326) has challenged US universities to ‘take teacher education seriously as an institutional responsibility or do not do it’. We suggest in order to take ITE seriously, the leaders of New Zealand’s universities must recognise that the work of teacher educators is often different from that of academic staff in other departments. Indeed, universities’ abilities to provide ITE rests in part on the nature of teacher educators that are employed and those teacher educators’ abilities to remain engaged with the teaching profession, while making a distinct contribution from that of school-based colleagues. Our research suggests that for some teacher educators, engagement with the profession is becoming increasingly difficult, while for others, opportunities to build upon practice knowledge by engaging in research and scholarship are limited. Furthermore, we argue that leaders of New Zealand universities would be wise to recognise that their dominance in ITE may be contested as it is elsewhere.
The ideologies that pose a ‘very real and sustained threat to “traditional” “university-based” routes . . . [and the] deliberate undermining of richer conceptualisations of the teacher as informed and empowered professional’ in England, highlighted in the introductory chapter of this volume by Moore and Bamber, are also evident in New Zealand. For example, our nation’s new partnership schools (a form of charter school) are permitted to ‘negotiate the number of registered teachers they employ’ (Ministry of Education, 2015, para.9), perhaps implying that neither ITE nor professional registration are considered by government as necessary (within teacher-led early childhood education, teacher registration is not compulsory and only 50 per cent of that teacher workforce are currently required to be qualified). Given these circumstances and ideologies, it is increasingly important therefore that university-based teacher educators and their leaders offer a clear vision of teaching as a profession and teachers as professionals, and furthermore provide coherent arguments about why the important work of teacher education should be entrusted to them.

Our research has explored institutional constructions of university-based teacher educators and examined the work engaged in by people in these roles. As part of this study, our investigation into university recruitment practices produced multiple constructions of the university-based teacher educator role. We named these: professional expert, traditional academic and dually qualified. Having identified these constructions, we are able to ask how they serve the object of building the profession of teaching. In so doing, we acknowledge that the terms ‘professional’ and ‘profession’ are contested and lack consensus of usage (Evans, 2008). However, while we recognise this, we leave it to others to discuss and suffice to suggest that the major constructions of the teaching profession in New Zealand are evolving and evident in the work of its teaching unions, Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand and Ministry of Education.

A brief history of initial teacher education in New Zealand

The story of ITE in New Zealand tells of an evolving and emerging profession and illustrates the influence of ‘travelling reforms’ (Seddon, 2014) and their application in a unique cultural historical context. Indeed, Ell and Grudnoff (2013, p.74) have argued that ‘Despite its physical isolation, networks of influence (Granovetter, 1973) and a colonial past ensure that New Zealand is very much in the thrall of international discourses’. Here we outline the history of ITE in New Zealand. We believe that the evolution of teaching from humble beginnings to complex and aspirational notions of a profession are likely to resonate with international readers, and an understanding of this is necessary to make sense of ITE in the nation today.

Prior to 1875, the establishment and provision of schools was the responsibility of provincial governments in New Zealand, which, according to King (2003, p.233), ‘had fulfilled (their charge) with varying degrees of conscientiousness’. At that time the majority of teachers in schools had immigrated to New Zealand from England and Scotland (Morton-Johnson and Morton, 1976) and the increasing
population of home grown teachers were prepared for their role by serving apprenticeships as pupil-teachers in schools (Kean, 2001). The selection criteria were liberal: regulations in the province of Otago merely stipulated that apprentice teachers ‘must be at least 13 years old and healthy’ (Morton-Johnson and Morton, 1976, p.4). At this point conceptions of teaching as a profession were remote. McClean (2009, p.57) argued ‘The notion that anyone with a little learning could become a teacher, if there was nothing better offering, was familiar to colonial settlers’. However, the nature of teacher preparation began to change in 1876 when the nation’s first teacher-training school opened: the Dunedin Normal School. From the outset, training at the school was offered in conjunction with the opportunity to study academic subjects at the fledgling University of Otago (Morton-Johnson and Morton, 1976), thus introducing theory into ITE and challenging simplistic conceptions of learning the ‘craft’ of teaching through observation. Nevertheless, this separation of roles is perhaps an early example of the embodiment of the so-called theory-practice gap that is a longstanding issue in ITE (Loughran, 2011). Over time, the relationships between colleges and universities waxed and waned: by the 1920s, students’ attendance at university had become optional and colleges offered education courses in addition to training. Half a century later, in the 1970s, many training colleges delivered joint education degrees in collaboration with universities. Two inter-related themes seem to offer some explanation for this, both of which are familiar to those currently interested in ITE. The first theme focused on aspirations to improve the ‘quality’ and the status of teachers, as evident in the discussion of raising the standard of their preparation to the same level as doctors and lawyers (McClean, 2009). The second theme comprised the practical issues of financing ITE and recruiting sufficiently well-qualified student teachers into the profession.

As of 2015, the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (successor to the now defunct New Zealand Teachers Council) is the professional body that sets and maintains the professional standards demanded of those entering the profession. These standards, the Graduating Teacher Standards (GTS) (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007), were drawn up after consultation with the educational community. They go beyond demanding essential pedagogical and content knowledge, as is perhaps more evident in England’s Teachers’ Standards (Department for Education, 2011), to describe graduating students from ITE as emerging professionals with knowledge of theories (standards 2a, 2b), who have reflected on and explored ‘the complex influences that personal, social and cultural factors may have on teachers and learners’ (standard 3a) and ‘have an understanding of education within the bicultural, multicultural, social, political, economic and historical contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand’ (standard 3c) (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007). We contend that universities in partnership with schools and early childhood centres are well equipped to support preservice teachers from ITE programmes to meet these standards by bridging the so-called theory-practice gap (Loughran, 2011) and facilitating opportunities to engage with important ideas and critique, reflect, examine, theorise, research and grapple with the work and identity of professional teachers.
Policy and ITE provision

It is perhaps not surprising that some of the major changes to ITE over the last 30 years have come about through the economic policy reforms of neo-liberalism rather than explicit educational reform. Indeed, in 1987, New Zealand’s Treasury published a two-volume brief for the re-elected Labour government, the second volume of which focused on education and reflected the language and arguments of the right wing economic politics of that time (Ray, 2009). Indeed, the brief’s authors argued that ‘Education shares the characteristics of other commodities traded in the market place’ (Treasury, 1987, p.33). New Zealand’s government embraced ‘market values’, and, as a result, competition was encouraged across the tertiary sector. This led to the deregulation of ITE, bringing fierce competition and variable standards (Alcorn, 2014; Rivers, 2006). In response to these challenges, in 2004, the then Minister of Education announced a moratorium for new ITE programmes (Mallard, 2004). Kane (2005) estimated that at that time over 90 per cent of New Zealand’s primary and secondary student teachers and 45 per cent of its early childhood teachers were being educated, at least in part, by universities. The culture of competition also resulted in mergers between tertiary institutions, notably colleges of education and universities. Starting in the 1990s, Waikato and then Massey Universities merged with their local colleges of education, and by 2007 all of New Zealand’s colleges of education had merged with universities, bringing the vast majority of ITE into the university sector. Nevertheless, an aspiring preservice teacher in New Zealand in 2012 could choose between 26 providers, comprising seven universities, six polytechnics, eight private training institutions and three wânanga (providers of tertiary education in a Māori context) (Ministry of Education, 2012). To date, ‘market values’ continue to shape the tertiary environment and ITE provision in New Zealand. Thus, it could be argued that the movement of ITE into universities in New Zealand has not resulted from the desire to raise the quality of teachers, but rather in response to economic policy.

In addition to the changes in the economic landscape, concerns about the quality of New Zealand’s teachers led to government agencies commissioning 20 or more reviews and reports from 1990 to 2010 that have led to policy changes for teacher education (Ell and Grudnoff, 2013, p.76). Of particular significance to ITE, the Education Standards Act (2001) resulted in the New Zealand Teachers Council (subsequently replaced by the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand in 2015) gaining responsibility for the approval and monitoring of ITE qualifications.

Just over a hundred years after the end of provincial control of education in New Zealand, processes of globalization began to more obviously shape the nation’s education policies. Furlong (2013, p.29) noted that during this time teacher education globally moved from ‘a relative backwater’ to an ‘essential concern for every education system that wants to come out on top’. The interest in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) from both politicians and media in New Zealand and the drive to emulate the top-performing nations lends support to this claim. This interest was fuelled during the first decade
of the new millennia by the internationally influential reports published by McKinsey and Company and the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) that brought increased attention to the work of ITE, as teachers were identified as a highly significant factor for the success and competitiveness of education systems (Barber and Mourshed, 2007; Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber, 2010; OECD, 2005). In his discussion of the influence of these reports, Coffield (2012, p.131) has argued that these conclusions ‘quickly hardened into new articles of faith for politicians, policy makers, educational agencies, and many researchers and practitioners’. Evidence of the adoption of this faith in New Zealand can be found in the Minister of Education’s report *A Vision for the Teaching Profession* (Ministry of Education, 2010). This report made recommendations on strategies aimed at bringing about ‘changes needed to support a more professional teaching profession’ (p.12). These included a recommendation that ITE, ‘move toward being provided only at postgraduate level (so that entry into teaching is dependent on holding a postgraduate qualification rather than one of the graduate level qualifications that is currently the norm)’ (p.4). Echoing historical themes in New Zealand ITE, the report argued that, ‘To ensure that the teaching profession can attract and retain high quality individuals, broad changes are needed in the way that the profession is perceived’ (p.2). It is of note that New Zealand’s strategy ‘to come out on top’ is in stark contrast to that of England, where funding for the short-lived Masters in Teaching and Learning Award ended with the arrival of the Conservative-Liberal Coalition government in 2010: new programmes of ITE at the Masters level have commenced (during 2014 and 2015) in seven of New Zealand’s eight universities.

Higher education in New Zealand has also been the subject of education policy. Indeed, an additional ‘travelling reform’ (Seddon, 2014) has had considerable impact on university-based ITE: the research evaluation exercises that have shaped institutions internationally (Middleton, 2009) have been enacted in New Zealand as the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF). The PBRF has resulted in significant pressure on university departments and individual academics to publish research. This is important to universities as it not only attracts funding, but also impacts on their status as research institutions. In contrast to an individual academic’s quality of teaching and service to the institution and the community, research outputs are much more quantifiable and as such have become an increasingly significant measure of success, important for employment and promotion.

Thus, at this moment in the story of ITE in New Zealand, universities are presented with an enviable opportunity to make a unique contribution to the development of the teaching profession, while also facing challenges of their own. In this context we have sought to understand how universities are responding to the current policy environment by investigating constructions of the category of academic worker: the university-based teacher educator.

**Work of Teacher Educators–New Zealand Research (WoTE-NZ)**

Our research project, the Work of Teacher Educators –NZ (WoTE-NZ), set out to understand the work of teacher educators in New Zealand universities and to
consider how university-based ITE can contribute to the development of emerging professionals. Our study was underpinned by the following research questions:

• How is ‘teacher educator’ constructed and maintained as a category of academic work?
• What do university-based teacher educators do? What are they working on?
• How do the pedagogical activities of teacher educators shape opportunities for student teachers’ learning?
• What are student teachers’ interpretations of and motives towards artefacts and activities within ITE?

We acknowledge that teacher educators are a heterogeneous group and can be difficult to define (Murray, Swennen and Shagrir, 2009); however, our work focused exclusively on university-based teacher educators as a consequence of the current dominance of universities in ITE provision in New Zealand. We have sought to use this study to contribute to a growing body of research that considers the Work of Teacher Educators (WoTE) internationally. Most significantly, we have built on research from the UK and Australia that explored the discursive construction and material conditions of teacher educators’ work (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis, McNicholl and Pendry, 2012; Ellis et al., 2013; Nuttall et al., 2013).

Our study was conducted in two phases: the first phase explored the cultural historical production and maintenance of ‘teacher educator’ as a category of worker within universities (Gunn et al., 2015), whereas the second phase examined teacher educators’ accounts of their own work. Combining an analysis of constructions of teacher educator with an analysis of the practices of teacher educators we have been able to explore the implications for ITE in New Zealand. Following Ellis et al. (2011), we used Engestrom’s (1987, 2001) cultural historical activity theory as a lens to view conceptions of teacher educators’ work and understand the activity systems in which that work is done.

In the first phase of our study we monitored a national university recruitment website and institutional websites over a period of six months spanning October 2013 to March 2014. This allowed us to collect advertisements and job descriptions for 37 posts in seven institutions. After careful consideration 11 of these were identified as being related closely to the work of ITE. To supplement the collected materials, we contacted the named personnel responsible for the job advertisements to request their participation in a telephone interview. Seven interviews were conducted with the use of a structured interview guide. Participants were asked to explain how decisions were made about: the content of the job advertisements; the processes involved in constructing the job and person descriptions; who was involved in the recruitment processes; and how teacher education was organised within their institution. We also asked the interviewees to share their views on teacher education as academic work.

In the second phase, we recruited a purposive sample of 15 teacher educators from two universities. This sample included teacher educators representing early childhood, primary and secondary education sectors. These participants engaged
in five activities: initial telephone interviews; work diaries; work shadowing observations; follow up interviews; and a participatory data analysis workshop where they were invited to work with the research team to understand the data using the tools of cultural historical activity theory. In addition to these, and extending the WoTE work conducted in the UK and Australia, preservice teachers who participated in the ITE activities that we observed, when work shadowing the teacher educators, were also invited to share their perspectives about the purposes of the activities in which they were engaged.

Three clear categories of teacher educator were evident from the findings both of a discourse analysis and a membership category analysis that were conducted independently of each other. The first type of teacher educator identified we named a ‘professional expert’; the second, ‘dually qualified’; and the third, ‘traditional academic’. A ‘professional expert’ is a teacher educator who is qualified to teach in schools or early childhood centres and has teacher registration and a practising certificate from the Education Council. The work of this type of teacher educator consisted of teaching and supervision of students in schools, with the added responsibility of building and maintaining relationships with colleagues in practice settings. The academic work of research was not a required feature of their work. Teaching work was described in recruitment materials as ‘delivery’ and these teacher educators as ‘needing to be supervised’. In sharp contrast, the ‘traditional academic’ construction of teacher educator was much more aligned to work that is common across university departments. The work of research was a strong feature of this category. There was no expectation that the teacher educators in this category have experience in schools or teacher registration. Thus, neither of these categories can engage in the full scope of the work of university-based teacher education. One category is excluded from the work of research and the other excluded from school and early childhood centre-based work. In contrast, the third category of teacher educator, ‘dually qualified’, comprised the work of both of these other constructions and thus would be able to engage in the full scope of this work. Dually qualified teacher educators are expected to have current teacher registration and school experience, together with research capability. Thus, they are qualified and able to teach in schools and to engage in educational research. However, in the first phase of this study we were only able to identify one position featuring the full scope of teacher educator work among the 11 advertised teacher educator positions (with the remaining ten positions comprising five in each of the other two categories). The phase two findings bolstered those in phase one, demonstrating that professional experts’ and traditional academics’ work differed, as did their status within the university. This notwithstanding, a further significant finding was that all of the teacher educators who participated in our study were engaged in the work of scholarship and research. However, for some this was completed outside of their formal work time and included private doctoral study. In summary, the most significant finding from the first phase of our research has been that current employment practices are favouring two of three identified constructions of teacher educator in New Zealand.
Consequences of the bifurcation of teacher educator work

New Zealand’s teacher educators work within a dual policy environment. This can be challenging, as responding to the policy environment of higher education and the policy environment of the school sector, including requirements from the Ministry of Education and the Education Council, may appear to be a double bind. These overlapping activity systems have unique objects of activity, rules and communities of practice. However, we maintain that the tension and challenge of working in partnership across these systems offers rich opportunities to enhance the profession of teaching in schools and early childhood settings by supporting the development of research-savvy, critically reflective and pedagogically proficient teachers – if approached thoughtfully. Furthermore, research active teacher educators who are able to work in genuine partnership with teachers in schools to research practice and build applied knowledge can serve the teaching profession by building collaborative scholarship.

The Ministry of Education in New Zealand funds ITE. Prior to funding, the Education Council must approve programmes. One condition of approval is that those teacher educators involved in the work of visiting, mentoring and assessing preservice teachers in schools and early childhood centres hold current Education Council practising certificates, are registered teachers and have school or early childhood teaching qualifications. A teacher or teacher educator must renew his/her practising certificate every three years to remain eligible to teach. This process is rigorous, involving holders providing evidence that they ‘have been meaningfully assessed against and have met the Practising Teacher Criteria’, are ‘fit to teach’ and ‘have completed satisfactory personal development’ (Education Council New Zealand, 2015). We support this requirement, despite the significant personal and institutional challenges it brings, as it ensures that those who are part of the community of professional teachers are involved in the process of inducting newcomers to the profession and suggest it has potential to bring theory to practice and practice to theory.

A major feature of the higher education policy environment in New Zealand is the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF). As New Zealand’s research evaluation, it has been initiated to increase the quality of research and research informed teaching (Smart, 2013). Consequently, universities compete for funding and status. For reasons explored elsewhere (see Hill and Haigh, 2012), university-based teacher educators may find it more of a challenge to produce research outputs than colleagues in other university departments. One seemingly pragmatic way universities appear to be responding to PBRF is to bifurcate the workforce into what we have termed ‘traditional academics’ and ‘professional experts’. Traditional academics can engage in the work of scholarship alongside their teaching, while their professional expert colleagues can do the busy and lower status work within the academy associated with practice (Spencer, 2013). It is important to note that we recognise the value of both these categories of teacher educator and are mindful of the outstanding work done by colleagues in these categories. Rather than diminishing their work, our purpose is to argue that current employment practices that seem to almost exclusively employ these
categories are deeply problematic. In contrast, we suggest that if universities support all teacher educators to research, thus work on the dual objects of ‘research productivity’ and ‘quality ITE’, universities and ITE will benefit. Furthermore, we argue that research is integral to ‘a profession’ as new knowledge is generated for practice. Consequently, university-based teacher educators can be ideally placed to support the development of research-savvy and researching professionals. However, this is subject to them also being included in the work of research.

We believe that the dually qualified category of teacher educator is ideally placed to challenge the so-called ‘theory-practice’ gap that Loughran (2011, p.280) argues is ‘an abiding issue in education’. An example of this from our own teaching and research is found in work around assessment in primary schools. The Education Council expects graduating teachers as they enter the profession to ‘have knowledge of a range of relevant theories, principles and purposes of assessment and evaluation’ (Graduating Teacher Standard 2b) and to ‘systematically and critically engage with evidence to reflect on and refine their practice’, ‘gather, analyse and use assessment information to improve learning and inform planning’ and ‘know how to communicate assessment information appropriately to learners, their parents/caregivers and staff’ (Graduating Teacher Standard 5 a, b, c). Traditional academics who work in the field of assessment can, and do, in our experience, teach the theory of assessment very effectively. Equally, our professional expert colleagues offer rich insight into the realities of assessment practices in classrooms. However, a comprehensive understanding of assessment theory and ongoing scholarly work married with practical experience of using assessment in primary classrooms allows us to show the importance of theory and how it informs practice. We support the argument made by Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006, p.1027) that ‘Teacher education practices that support the search for “the recipe” for how to teach or make it appear as though teaching is simple and unproblematic reduce the impact of the conflicting demands associated with learning to teach’. However, we are aware that helping preservice teachers apply and appreciate theory in the messy and complex world of practice demands teacher educators have expertise in both. Consequently, we argue that the recruitment practices that we observed that largely ignored the third category of teacher educator, the dually qualified, are short-sighted and are excluding would-be teacher educators who are best placed to synthesise theory and practice. These practices have implications for the profession of teaching as those entering it are less likely to encounter teacher educators that can bridge the worlds of research and practice and use both scholarship and professional experience to scaffold their development. Furthermore, this situation has implications for universities, who may find themselves ill-prepared should New Zealand’s ITE move to the postgraduate level as this would require teacher educators with both professional accreditation and higher degrees.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have charted the journey of the teaching profession from 19th century pupil-teachers to 21st century university-prepared professionals.
Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) has noted that teaching (in the USA) is in a similar position to where medicine was in 1910. She explains that the time in preparation programmes for physicians ranged enormously in both length and quality. For contemporary readers, it may be hard to imagine that arguments were made against the professionalisation of medicine that suggested ‘medicine could best be learned following a doctor around in a buggy’ (p.39). Few in our societies would be prepared to trust ill-prepared physicians with responsibility for our medical care. Rather, we are likely to expect a rigorous professional preparation for their work. At this time, wealthy nations, such as New Zealand, have the opportunity to accord similar status to the teaching profession and support the development of richly prepared professional teachers.

We are encouraged that New Zealand’s Ministry of Education, rather than looking to school-based models of teacher preparation, is trialling Master’s level ITE which incorporates theory with practice following celebrated successes overseas, most notably in Finland. At the time of writing we are approaching the end of the second year of the trial and questions remain to be answered as to how best to proceed. However, we believe this rich conceptualisation of university-based teacher preparation has potential to serve the profession of teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand by supporting the development of highly skilled, thoughtful teachers able to cope with complex and changing learning environments with diverse students. Such a model enacted in New Zealand would support calls to give greater collective agency to the professional community and thus elevate the profession, as is currently the case in Finland (Toom et al., 2010). Consequently, we call on those responsible for the recruitment and development of teacher educators in New Zealand’s universities to flex to ensure their practices support these richer conceptions of ITE and in so doing serve emerging professional teachers, the teaching profession and their own long-term needs.

References


