Beyond Initial Transition: An International Examination of the Complex Work of Experienced Literacy/English Teacher Educators

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Abstract
This article reports on a study of 21 mid-career and senior literacy/English teacher educators in four countries: Canada, the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia. Three main themes are discussed: identity (re)construction; knowledge development (e.g. of pedagogy; current literacy practices); and reconceptualisation of their work (courses and research). The literacy/English teacher educators had moved beyond the struggles of novice teacher educators; however, they still experienced a number of tensions. They had moved beyond identifying with and as a classroom teacher but felt that they needed to remain connected to teachers because their research is conducted in schools. They still felt less valued by their colleagues who were not actively involved in teacher education, not because they were novices, but because of their close involvement in schools. They found communities of literacy/English teacher educators beyond their university. All argued that they must continue to expand their knowledge in a number of areas but they see their continuous growth as a strength not a short-coming. By mid-career many created a synergy among their research, teaching, and service.

Keywords
teacher educators, literacy education, higher education

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It’s not enough to have studied [literacy], one needs to have seen these things in practice and had opportunities to reflect on success and failure ... I am always modelling the kind of literacy educator I want student teachers to become.

‘Pietro’ (Pseudonyms are used throughout the article)

Introduction

Current research reveals the complex (and often hidden) challenges new teacher educators encounter (Boyd and Harris 2012; McKeon and Harrison 2012; Murray and Male 2005). No longer is the work of teacher educators viewed as identical to the work of classroom teachers; however, teacher educators are still an under-researched group (Finnegan and Hyle 2009; Martinez 2008). There is an emerging body of research on the transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator (Dinkelman 2003; Williams, Ritter, and Bullock 2012). Yet there is still much work to be done as there is little systematic research on teacher educators beyond their induction (or lack thereof) and early years in higher education (HE). By studying mid-career and senior teacher educators in a curriculum area (literacy/English), we are deepening our knowledge of a group Cochran-Smith (2003: 5-6) calls the ‘linchpins’ of education.

Our large-scale research project, Literacy Teacher Educators: Their Goals, Visions, and Practices, examines literacy/English teacher educators (LTEs) from Canada, the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia. There are three phases to this study. This article reports on the first two phases, the goal of which is:

- to study in depth a group of literacy/English teacher educators, with special attention to their backgrounds, knowledge, research activities, identity, view of current government initiatives, pedagogy, and course goals.

Since most of our participants were no longer novice teacher educators, we could study how they handled the multiple challenges they faced, hear their considered views on their work, and understand how they developed their role and pedagogy over time. This study revealed several aspects of being a teacher educator and provided a holistic picture, which led to a deeper understanding of the nature and practices of literacy/English teacher educators.

Literature Review

In this literature review we draw on the growing research on novice teacher educators to provide a baseline for our findings. We identify three prevalent themes – teacher educators’ professional identity; their knowledge development; and their reconceptualisation of their work.
**Professional Identity**

Studies indicate that most novice teacher educators maintain, to a degree, their classroom teacher identity (Boyd and Harris 2010; Carillo and Baguley 2011; Dinkelman, Margolis, and Sikkenga 2006a, 2006b; Ducharme, 1993; McKeon and Harrison 2012; Murray and Male 2005; Swennen, Shagir, and Cooper 2009). This is an identity with which they are comfortable and many novice teacher educators feel that identifying themselves as teachers gives them credibility in the eyes of their students. However, transition from classroom teacher to academic requires a change in self-perception and the new identity does not arrive fully formed on the day they enter academia. ‘Becoming a teacher educator involves more than a job title … Developing an identity and practices in teacher education is best understood as a process of becoming’ (Dinkelman 2003, p. 1).

The process of developing a new identity is complex (Dinkelman et al. 2006a, 2006b; Bullock and Christou 2009). While there is a perception of moving upward into HE, Boyd and Harris (2010) note that novice teacher educators ‘are aware of a change to a lower status within their new institution’ (p.13). In addition Murray and Male (2005) in their ground-breaking research found:

> The transition from the first-order setting of school teaching into the second-order setting of HE (higher education) based teacher education was constructed by the majority of the interviewees as a distinct and stressful career change, characterized by high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. Recurring feelings about the early years of HE work were of being ‘de-skilled’, of ‘struggle’, and of ‘masquerading’

Murray and Male 2005: 129.

Novice teacher educators often struggle to ‘fit in’ (McKeon and Harrison 2012) and feel a sense of isolation. No longer ‘teachers’ but not yet fully fledged members of the university, they are in an awkward space. They have not yet had time to develop a new identity, are often overwhelmed by the demands on them, and lack skill for their new work (Bullock and Christou 2009; Dinkelman et al. 2006a; Kitchen 2009). Not surprisingly, they often cling to an identity that worked for them previously; but in order to be productive members of the university they need an identity to match their new work activities and new institutional culture.

Teacher educators’ identity come from a variety of sources: for example, internalisation of societal views of the profession (Kennedy 2005); memories of their own teachers’ practices when they were in school (Lortie 1975); how they were viewed by others (Jenkins 2006); and prior notions about what they would be able to achieve, often based more on optimism than experience. As they engage in all aspects of being teacher educators they have an opportunity to refine their identity considerably (Kosnik 2007).
Knowledge development
The knowledge that teacher educators need is vast and complicated (Ball 2000; Darling-Hammond 2006; Kosnik and Beck 2009). Loughran (2006) argues that one cannot simply replicate one’s practices as a classroom teacher in the university setting; there is no direct application of the skills used for teaching children to teaching adults. Teacher educators come to their new position with substantial knowledge about classroom teaching, but Murray and Male (2005) note that ‘in order to achieve the dual focus of teaching about teaching, new teacher educators needed to develop further pedagogical knowledge and understanding, appropriate for the second-order setting’ (p.137). Novice teacher educators find that their knowledge is insufficient because it needs to be ‘repackaged’ and broadened.

Although teacher educators usually have extensive experience of teaching in a school classroom, they need new skills for a new context – the university. Murray (2005) states:

*In making the career transition to HE they encounter the practices, norms and expectations of academic work, as instantiated in the settings of the teacher education departments of their Universities or Colleges of Higher Education*  
Murray 2005: 22

Kosnik (2007) describes how, as a beginning teacher educator, she focused on providing student teachers with a steady diet of practical teaching strategies because that was what she was missing as a new teacher; however, through self-study of her practices she realised this was inadequate because it did not provide a coherent approach to teaching undergirded by research. She needed to deepen her knowledge of all aspects of literacy research.

In addition to deepening their knowledge of relevant research and acquiring pedagogical skills appropriate for HE, novice teacher educators also have to improve their research skills. As universities scramble to improve their research output, there is pressure on novice teacher educators to quickly secure grants and publish. Murray and Male (2005) found that novice teacher educators feel like novice researchers but are expected to be expert researchers. Many novice teacher educators have conducted one main research study – their doctorate – and may have been members in teacher inquiry groups. But this does not adequately prepare them for the research demands (e.g. securing grants and publishing in top tier journals) felt by academics.

Re-conceptualising the work of a teacher educator
As novice teacher educators move to HE, the rhythm of their work is quite different from school teaching (Dinkelman et al. 2006a). Ducharme (1993) observed that professors of education enjoy ‘a new life of self-direction, of autonomy’ (p.48) very different from what they experienced as teachers, but organising and managing this new autonomy is often unnerving. For example,
preparing a course syllabus (e.g. readings and assignments) requires different processes and skills from preparing long range plans for a fifth grade class. Developing a research agenda requires a range of conceptual, practical, and political skills that far surpasses those needed for their PhD dissertation (Kosnik et al. 2011). Novice teacher educators are required to develop a plan to enact their multi-faceted work (teaching, research, and service). This is not an easy task because they need to figure out what they are trying to accomplish, how their research and teaching mesh, and how these goals may actually be reached (finding a work-life balance), while also figuring out the politics of their new workplace (Skerrett 2008).

Using these three themes – professional identity; knowledge development; and reconceptualising the work of teacher education – we will later go on to analyse the findings of our research on literacy/English teacher educators.

**Methodology**

To put together the sample of 28 literacy/English teacher educators, we compiled lists from a balance of Tier 1 (research-intensive) and Tier 2 (teaching-focused) institutions and systematically worked through them. Some were invited because we knew they taught literacy methods courses, others because they had published research in literacy. To make the sample consistent we invited only those who had a doctorate. We tried to ensure there was a range of experience (e.g. elementary/primary and secondary teaching), and a gender representation comparable to that in the profession as a whole. Six declined our invitation to participate for a variety of reasons (e.g., assuming a new administrative position and so not teaching literacy methods courses). To our knowledge, none declined because of lack of interest.

In regards to the literacy/English teacher educators’ relative experience, we understood the terms novice, mid-career, and senior in the following way:

- novice: 0 – 4 years experience
- mid-career: 5 – 10 years experience
- senior: 10 + years experience

For the purposes of this report we only included LTEs with five years or more experience, therefore we limited our sample from the original 28 to 21 participants.

We interviewed participants once over the period April to August, 2012. Each interview was approximately one hour in length and had five parts: background experiences; qualities (in their view) of an effective literacy educator; identity (e.g. your academic community, audience for your writing); turning points in your career (personal and professional); and research activities. Interviews were done either face-to-face or on Skype and were audio-recorded and
transcribed. The interview was semi-structured. We asked the same questions of all participants but added probe questions and welcomed additional comments. Most of the questions were open-ended in that they sought more than a yes/no or simple factual answer.

Much of our methodology was qualitative as defined by Merriam (2009) and Punch (2009). We believe qualitative inquiry is justified as it provides depth of understanding and enables exploration of questions that do not on the whole lend themselves to quantitative inquiry (Guyton and McIntyre 1990; Guzzetti et al. 1999; Merriam 2009). It opens the way to gaining entirely unexpected ideas and information from participants in addition to finding out their opinions on simple pre-set matters. We used a grounded theory approach which does not begin with a fixed theory but generates theory inductively from the data using a set of techniques and procedures for collection and analysis (Punch 2009). As the analysis progressed, we identified key themes and refined them – adding some and deleting or merging others – through ‘constant comparison’ with the interview transcripts. As Strauss puts it (2003), ‘The basic question facing us is how to capture the complexity of the reality (phenomena) we study, and how to make convincing sense of it’ (p. 16).

For data analysis we used NVivo9, going through a number of steps:

(1) Our initial coding of the transcripts was fairly broad, leading to 42 nodes/themes. Some arose straightforwardly as answers to our interview questions (e.g. background experience as a classroom teacher) while others emerged unexpectedly (e.g. fell into doing a PhD).

(2) After two rounds of coding we collapsed our analysis into 24 nodes/themes; however, within the 24 (e.g. early childhood experiences) there were sub-nodes (e.g. gaps in knowledge had sub-nodes of knowledge of research, knowledge of schools). With NVivo we were able to double and triple code certain content (e.g. the same material might relate to influence on practice, classroom teacher experience, and pedagogy). In addition to consulting the transcripts, we also kept returning to the literature to assist with analysis (Wold et al. 2011).

(3) As we analysed the quotes, annotations, and memos we developed summary findings for three areas in particular: identity; knowledge; and work.

Given the sophistication of NVivo9, we were able to conduct queries to see relationships between the biographical data and other data (e.g. PhD area of study and current research activities). NVivo9 allowed us to draw upon and develop both qualitative and quantitative data.

Findings
As the list below shows, our entire sample included LTEs with range of experience both as classroom teachers and as university faculty.
Experience as a classroom teacher

0 years = 1
1–5 years = 1
6–10 years = 9
11–20 years = 6
21+ years = 4

Years at the university

6–10 years = 10
11–15 years = 2
16–20 years = 5
21+ years = 4

Professional identity

Many of our LTEs were at the point in their career where they had tenure, a respectable publication record, a repertoire of teaching skills, and involvement in a number of international organisations. Having lived through the often-difficult transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator, we assumed that they would have a sense of achievement with an identity as full-fledged academics. However, our research suggested that even mid-career/senior literacy/English teacher educators must continue to negotiate their identity because of the inherent complexities of being a literacy teacher educator.

a. Feeling like a fraud, again.

In order to determine how LTEs saw themselves, we asked them to select descriptive terms from a list:

Terms participants used to describe self
(could select more than one)

- Literacy professor – 15
- Teacher educator – 17
- Teacher – 14
- Professor – 3
- Other: Learn with kids – 1; Lecturer – 2;
- Teacher trainer – 1; Associate Dean
- Researcher -1

We were surprised that 14 of the 21 chose the term teacher, which has a lower status in academia. When we probed why they still chose to identify as teachers we had a range of responses: tremendous respect for teachers;
still conducting research in schools so they needed to walk the talk with teachers; and 20 stated that the audience for their work was both teachers and researchers. There was however a conflict for many because they felt that they had outgrown their teacher communities, reluctantly admitting that they were no longer that interested in teacher-focused conferences (and issues).

*If I go to Literacy conferences or English Teachers’ conferences, I know lots of people there and I’ve known them for a long time. I’m still the nice guy who’s got some good ideas of things to do with children’s books … but I don’t think I want to do more of that sort of thing.*

Chester

Yet they could not shed their teacher identity because their research was mainly conducted in schools (e.g. 20 have research projects in schools) and they had to remain current regarding government and/or school-based initiatives. Demerra commented, ‘I stay in touch with teachers because they keep me so tuned in.’ However, feeling somewhat distanced from teachers led to some feeling like a fraud – they were not classroom teachers, their interests had changed, yet they still had to be involved with teacher groups, and as discussed later in this section, their student teachers wanted to see them as teachers. Novice teacher educators felt like frauds working in HE because of their lack of experience, but mid-career/senior teacher educators felt like frauds because their colleagues and interests had expanded beyond the four walls of the elementary/primary or secondary classroom.

Recognising that their identity and skill set would continue to evolve and expand was now a given, no longer causing the stress new LTEs experience. Learning to be an LTE would never stop; many spoke of being a learner as a strength. Dominique described her intellectual curiosity in terms of ‘always wanting to continue to learn and grow and think deeper about the ways that children engage in literacy … Seeing myself as a learner, that’s my strength …’

b. Confident with their teaching.

Teaching well was very important to the LTEs in our sample. Pietro echoed the sentiment of many: ‘I work hard on my teaching.’ Compared to novice LTEs who worry about the quality of their teaching, our LTEs talked with confidence about the fact they were effective university instructors. A number had either been nominated for teaching awards or won teaching awards which validated their identity as exemplary teachers. Caterina identified winning the University Chancellor’s Award for teaching as one of the highlights of her 25+ year career in education. High course evaluations and nominations for teaching awards solidified their identity as able instructors.
Having a much clearer sense of the kind of HE instructors they wanted to be was apparent as they had resolved many of the conflicts novice teacher educators experience regarding the fine boundary between being flexible and being firm with students. They realised the value of the affective qualities of being a teacher educator and were not afraid that having a caring stance would undermine their authority as professors/lecturers. When asked to define the qualities of an effective LTE, 17 of the 21 included the ‘softer’ qualities of caring and being supportive in addition to subject expertise. Jessie commented: ‘Students generally like me as a person, I think, because I’m approachable.’ Jane described herself as ‘being compassionate and caring about the students.’ Melissa got to know her students ‘on a personal level.’ Pietro saw one of his strengths as ‘listening to what my students are saying about their ideas and taking partial understandings and half-conceptions … without making them feel vulnerable, exposed.’

c. Hierarchy.

Identity construction for novice LTEs is complex because they are often undervalued as academics (Ducharme and Ducharme 1996; Labaree 2004). To determine if this was still the case we asked the 21 if they felt there was a hierarchy in their department, and many responded with a resounding yes:

Is there a hierarchy in your school of education/department?

| Tier 1 (research-intensive) | Yes – 13, No - 1 |
| Tier 2 (teaching-focused) | Yes – 5; No- 2 |

Those in Tier 1 universities felt that their colleagues most removed from schooling held the highest place in the hierarchy, which left them in an awkward space since their work was often closely tied to schooling. Having reached what should be a comfortable point in their career, many did not feel respected by their colleagues and had to continue to prove themselves. Beatrice stated: ‘There’s a huge hierarchy. In the Education Department there is a hierarchy because those who are not involved in the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) have a higher status than those who are.’ The lack of respect was not because they were novice teacher educators; rather, it was because of their close involvement in teacher education (i.e. teaching literacy/English methods courses). They felt marginalised in their home department. Margie described her frustration with her colleagues: ‘I would say that’s because of the popular image of a teacher educator as someone who focuses primarily on practice. … The critical pedagogues [in my department] call us teacher educators schoolies.’ These veteran academics had grudgingly accepted this state of affairs but continued to rail against it, believing they were academics equal to their peers.
Moreover, although all our participants had secured research funds, they felt these grants were viewed by their non-teacher education colleagues as inferior because their research was done in schools. Many felt they were not fully respected as researchers by their colleagues. Dominique noted the discrepancy even in her education department:

*If you’re talking to folks who value work in schools, then it’s a big plus. If you’re talking to people who don’t see the need to be in the classroom, who think you should just send graduate students out to collect data … you don’t come across as a serious researcher. And I hate to say this, but sometimes it seems to be folks who do more quantitative work who don’t understand why you would need to spend your time watching kids.*  Dominique

d. Student teachers’ mixed perceptions

Working with student teachers was complicated. Justin, who teaches in a secondary English PGCE course, noted the complexity as follows:

*On a good day … one has some credibility with one’s student teachers precisely because one can talk from first-hand experience. At the same time, on a bad day, I’m aware that students think this must have happened in some era where dinosaurs roamed the earth and it’s really not relevant to current reality.*  Justin

Many said that recognition by their student teachers as able teacher educators helped them see themselves as capable faculty who belonged in HE. Emma commented that ‘my students’ evaluations say that I know my subject very well.’ By contrast with novice teacher educators, our participants felt secure in themselves as very able instructors. However, many voiced a concern that student teachers lacked respect for them as researchers. Carolina noted: ‘I think they are more impressed that I have been a classroom teacher than by the fact that I have a doctorate.’ This created a tension, because many of them did not want to be steadily distributing teaching strategies, seeing themselves as researchers, not simply classroom teachers transplanted to higher education. Some resented having to deal with the never-ending changes in the official curricula and the constant demand from students for practical ‘tricks of the trade’.

Although being a researcher is highly important to them individually, quite a few rarely shared their research activities with their student teachers. Margie lamented, ‘I don’t tell the student teachers about my research because quite frankly they are not that interested in it.’ A number of LTEs tried to close this chasm between their research and teaching lives by involving their student teachers in their research. For example, Rachel, who had a grant to support
drama in primary classrooms, invited her student teachers to assist with the workshops and accompanying research. Trying to be true to themselves as researchers while working with student teachers was an on-going negotiation.

The LTEs in our study had developed an identity with which they were comfortable. Although they felt that they were unfairly ‘judged’ by others, their passion for their work, contact with colleagues beyond their university, and their academic successes (e.g. publishing and securing grants) helped them see themselves as full-fledged academics.

**Knowledge development**

Our LTEs illustrated a breadth of knowledge of the field of literacy and a depth of understanding of initial teacher education, see Figure 1. Having to span two disciplines, literacy and teacher education, added to the complex nature of LTEs’ work. They spoke of a number of spheres of knowledge: knowledge of pedagogy in higher education; knowledge of politics (in both HE and with government); knowledge of research on literacy, and; knowledge of current literacy practices and materials in school districts. Our study showed how LTEs conceptualised the dynamic and overlapping layers of their knowledge.

*a. Knowledge of research*

Research on novice teacher educators has revealed that they feel like beginners regarding research yet were expected to be experts (Murray and Male 2005).

**Figure 1:** Spheres of Knowledge Development
Our mid-career/senior LTEs had long since moved past these feelings of inadequacy because most had consistently secured large-scale research grants, implying they had expertise as researchers. In describing their research studies, many had collaborators from various countries; in addition to the prestige of working on the international stage, some commented that their research skills were strengthened through these collaborations. Carolina felt privileged to be part of an international research team, adding that it ‘helps me reach beyond the local to the global and I think that’s an important perspective to have.’

In their doctoral studies our participants had investigated a wide range of topics: for example, studying female college dropouts; investigating pre-service student teachers’ use of critical pedagogy; and analysing elementary school text books. The extent to which they kept to the same area in subsequent research varied:

Doctoral research was ongoing 11
Somewhat the same 6
Research field had shifted 4

On the one hand, many had not expanded significantly beyond the narrow focus of their doctorate. Carolina, for example, stayed close to her original area of research because the university expected her to ‘have a very fine area of interest’ which obliged her to remain narrow. On the other hand, some significantly extended their original research area. Maya described her doctoral research as an ethnographic study of grade one writing; her current research expanded to include writing in grade one in a diverse school population. Some had changed their focus entirely. A research development initiative grant enabled Sharon to ‘experiment to try out a new line of research’. She moved from sociocultural issues in children’s writing to giving feedback on writing at university level. Hailey, who did her doctoral research on women entering education as their second career, shifted her focus to the teaching of reading when she was assigned to teach courses in reading; she then began to study beginning literacy teachers because she felt this was an under-researched area.

b. Knowledge of pedagogy of higher education

Many of the participants felt their pedagogy as novice LTEs was weak, either too focused on practice or too focused on theory. Many recalled that they had no support from their department to develop their course outlines/syllabi. However, as mid-career/senior LTEs their priorities had evolved. Margie came to the realisation that ‘The social construction of knowledge... is a far deeper way of learning than “I hope I memorise enough to pass the test”.’ Hence, she changed her approach so student teachers took much greater ownership of the course. Pietro emphasised modelling, which was noted by almost all as essential to pedagogy for teacher education.
Many recognised that they could not always meet the needs of all their student teachers. Most had come to accept that some of their classes/lessons would be less than stellar. They no longer fretted about the few students who gave them negative evaluations, and they recognised that course evaluations did provide some useful feedback (which they kept in perspective). So many commented that student teachers had unrealistic or inappropriate expectations that we created a node in Nvivo called ‘student teachers do not know what they need.’

Over time, the LTEs gained much more confidence that their pedagogical decisions genuinely supported student teacher learning. One of the personal strengths many noted was the ability to conceptualise their course around broad goals with a corresponding pedagogy. Course syllabi often included quite specific aims. But when we asked, ‘What is essential for student teachers to know at the end of the course?’, their responses took us by surprise: they had overarching goals that were not specific curriculum objectives but broader and deeper. For example, they wanted their student teachers to come to see teaching as a relational act rather than a matter of teaching specific skills. They wanted student teachers to:

- respond to the pupils
- recognise that all students are different
- think creatively
- use assessment to understand pupils
- honour students
- build a relationship with students
- know that the standards are the floor not the ceiling
- learn more than one curriculum model
- democratisé knowledge
- learn who has knowledge
- view pupils as intellectual resources
- have a broad conception of literacy
- use multicultural texts and resources

Over time, many acquired a deeper understanding of literacy/English teaching at the HE level and a substantial repertoire of pedagogies (i.e. class activities). Margie admitted she had to grow into her understanding of how to teach at the university level noting: ‘What I think I have learned over the years is that education is not done to people, it’s done with people.’ This acquired knowledge enabled her to step back and decide what was important in her teaching practice.

c. Knowledge of the field of literacy

Our mid-career/senior LTEs had clearly moved past a sense of inadequacy that undermines the confidence of novice teacher educators. They had a maturity
about their knowledge accepting that they simply cannot ‘know it all’. Demerra commented:

You have to feel confident, knowing that you don’t know it all and that’s okay. There are ways that we can learn together, instead of setting yourself up to be the person in front of the room who has all the knowledge and no one else knows more than you.

Many of the LTEs fully embraced current views of literacy (e.g. multiliteracies); being technologically savvy allowed some to fully use multimodalities. They might be digital immigrants (Barlow 1996) but many of the mid-career/senior LTEs were on the cutting edge of technology input. Some were not. Remaining current both with research and pedagogy was demanding as education evolves worldwide. Hence, the LTEs experienced a degree of tension, sensing an urgency to remain current and fresh.

Many LTEs described their views of literacy as evolving past traditional notions of reading and writing. They emphasised the importance of non-traditional literacies in their courses, using terms such as ‘out of school literacies’, ‘home literacies’ and ‘community literacies’. Additionally, LTEs such as Justin and Pietro explicitly spoke about abandoning the deficit model of language and literacy. Justin described one of his strengths as being able to ‘start from conceptualising learners as active, as cultural participants and as producers, not as a kind of blank slate, or as in a deficit.’ When asked for desirable qualities of an LTE, Sara, like many of the others said she would want them to have a ‘broader understanding of literacies and literacy teaching’

d. Knowledge of current school and government initiatives

All our LTEs were still involved with schools and teachers to a fair extent (20 of the 21 were actively conducting research in schools). Many had a close connection to schools through their in-service teaching or other professional activities (e.g. with teacher federations/unions), or through family members/friends who were currently teachers. Through these links they felt that they were staying abreast of school/government initiatives and practices. All 21 felt that getting out of touch with schools would seriously hamper their work and their credibility with their student teachers. But staying current was difficult – initiatives changed so rapidly that even in a few months they could be out of touch.

Compounding the challenge was the fact that some LTEs, like Emma, were ‘blocked all access to [government] resources unless you are an employee of the education department.’ Our participants felt it was difficult to prepare student teachers for mandated curriculum when they did not have access to
the websites, materials and resources. Caterina said these sorts of restrictions made their job very challenging as ‘a lot of education now is top-down. I mean, teachers are being told more now what they have to do in their classrooms than when I was in the classroom.’ Ironically, it was the very governments that created the initiatives that were making it difficult to promote them.

**LTEs Re-conceptualising their work**

When recalling their efforts as novice LTEs, several mentioned feeling overwhelmed and in ‘survival mode’. Over the years, they were able to think through their work and prioritise what they felt was most important. As mid-career/senior LTEs they had re-conceptualised their work, see Figure 2.

*a. Critical stance*

Since the term critical was used repeatedly by the interviewees, we asked them to provide their ‘working definition’ of the term to clarify what it meant to them. Through analysis of the many explanations, we concluded that a common underpinning was that ‘critical’ was a *stance* which included dispositions and attitudes that guided their work:

*Reflective:* [A] constant grappling with ideas, an openness to new experiences, new empirical data, new theories that would cause one to look at things from a different angle.  

  Giovanni

*Listener:* [A]n ability to listen to the kind of experiences that the teachers and trainee teachers have.  

  Chester

**Figure 2:** LTEs Re-conceptualise their work
Learner: [Y]ou have to feel confident knowing that you don’t know it all and that’s okay and that there are ways we can learn together...You have to have some intellectual curiosity. Dominique

Advocate: [T]eachers [must] see themselves as advocates. Giovanni

Many LTEs held a critical stance when they were classroom teachers, yet some recalled that when they were novice LTEs, this stance had created anxiety. Initially, some tried to remain neutral, uncertain if they should be critically minded or to what extent they should encourage student teachers to critique government initiatives (e.g. focusing on 19th century texts such as Byron and Shelley, as Michael Gove British Secretary of State for Education recommends). Several participants described how, over time, they found subtle ways to include critical conversations into their pre-service classrooms by facilitating rich discussions, using video footage from their research in classrooms to analyse practice, and setting tasks for students during practice teaching where they investigated the ‘actual’ goals of their cooperating teachers’ literacy programme.

Others, like Beatrice, had consistently maintained the critical stance they had as teachers. As a beginning LTE, Beatrice openly critiqued schools in many newspaper articles, and continued to do so as a late-career LTE. Similarly, Justin consistently put his critical stance at the centre of his practice, believing this perspective should permeate the work of all LTEs:

[T]here are such strong pressures on us merely to be compliant, and to be critical is to emphasise a different perspective... [A]nd therefore as people who don’t simply implement what is thrust upon them, but to continue to pose the question how might it be otherwise, seems to me absolutely essential to do the job well. Justin

Many LTEs described how this stance extended beyond the university lecture hall; for example, some encouraged their student teachers to join them in efforts with immigrant communities through church-based outreach programmes. Out-of-school literacies were valued and put at the forefront for many. Misa described community engagement, an integral part of her work, as opportunities for: ‘thinking about the teaching and learning experience beyond just what happens in the day-to-day classroom or school context; being engaged with parents; being engaged with community literacy practices.’ Many worked with their student teachers to explore hidden agendas (e.g. marginalisation of ELL student). They hoped this in turn would encourage beginning teachers to adopt a critical stance towards literacy.

b. Synergy and Synthesis
Whereas novice LTEs tend to divide their work into silos (e.g. research, teaching, service), the mid-career/senior LTEs appeared to have mastered a synergy among different aspects. This synergy facilitated their research informing their practice and their practice informing their research. Our participants tended to conceptualise their work as their life work, and so a natural flow was created between theory and practice. When asked about what qualities an LTE should possess, Carolina commented on the need for a seamless integration of research and teaching, which she believed to be a crucial part of the work of LTEs. She elaborated:

*I think my experiences... of research on classroom interaction really influenced [the way] I structure and design my teaching for my pre-service teachers. So classroom interaction is a core practice and in developing that ... I bring the connectivity between classroom practices, pedagogy development, and theory.*

Carolina

Some of our LTEs were involved in practice teaching supervision, which presented a range of challenges including insufficient time. However, several described their supervision as a learning opportunity, not simply a service requirement, because it gave them a lens for analysing current teaching practices and government initiatives. They often used examples from their practice teaching supervision in their HE teaching. Again creating a synergy between aspects of their work.

c. Curricula come and gone

As beginning LTEs they may have only experienced one or two mandated curricula; however by mid-career many have witnessed as many as five. Several had ‘lived through’ a variety of national curricula, each one valuing certain aspects of literacy and they expressed a decided aversion to having to teach directly to these mandates.

Literacy practices (e.g. use of levelled readers), curriculum expectations (e.g. emphasis on phonics), and political agendas (e.g. funding for alternative certification programmes) changed regularly. Mid-career/senior LTEs understood the dynamic and ever-changing landscape of literacy education and viewed their role as preparing pre-service teachers for any and every national curriculum and policy they may encounter. Pietro explained: ‘I’m simultaneously trying to figure out how to prepare teachers for the schools we have, while preparing them for the schools we want...you need to know how to envision the possible.’ Those in England and Australia felt that the newest version of the literacy curriculum was regressive. Bob said: ‘It [the national curriculum] involves going back to a very traditional understanding of literature teaching ... The most destructive impact, however, has been brought by the imposition of standardised testing across the country.’
One of the ways they accomplished their broad and progressive goals and side stepped the tone and tenor of the national curriculum was by keeping a focus on the pupils. Melissa explained:

//One of the main things I say to the students is, ‘You’re not teaching Literacy, you’re teaching the student. You’re not teaching the curriculum. The student should be in the middle and to try to stretch the curriculum to fit around that.’

Melissa

d. Stepping back: What do new teachers need?

Many novice teacher educators focus their courses around providing practical resources for their student teachers (Kosnik 2007) mainly due to constant requests for ‘how to’ tips. Over time, our study participants developed a clearer sense of what their student teachers truly needed to be effective teachers. As Sharon noted, too heavy an emphasis on the practical is as inappropriate as too much theory. One of the strategies we used to understand their goals and pedagogy was to inquire about the assignments they set. In analysing the description of the assignments, we found that they were steeped in the theory that was co-constructed through discussion and reflection in class. The order of the assignments was purposefully designed; for example, some progressed from self (e.g. literacy autobiography), to children (e.g. profile of a struggling reader), to teaching (e.g., inquiry project). The assignments actualised the theory, often requiring, student teachers to work with children and then present their findings to classmates. A common thread was to include reflection followed by revisiting of assumptions held at the start of the programme. There was consistently a blend of theory and practice (e.g. doing a digital essay on multimodalities; experiencing the writing process).

The answer we received to the question ‘What do new teachers need?’ varied somewhat. Chester, whose students were required by OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills, which inspects and regulates services w for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages) to focus on learning how to teach a phonics-driven curriculum felt this narrow view of literacy compromised their learning, leading to gaps in their understanding of language, cognition, and social context. Emma elaborated on this point when she discussed the tension in her current research study on:

...the competing discourses of writing in primary classrooms.
Where on the one hand, the teachers are being asked to teach the basics in order to prepare students to do the national testing, while at the same time they are being asked to produce these kind of 21st century knowledge citizens.
Discussion

The LTEs in this study for the most part held very progressive views of literacy/English. This resulted in a further mismatch: between their views and practices and their student teachers’ expectations for the course. There is a chasm between the two views. Many LTEs want their student teachers to ‘unlearn’ many of their present assumptions and adopt an enlightened, rich view of literacy. Negotiating this gap is demanding for both instructors and students. Is this realistic? Is it feasible? Laudable, but is it doable? Much more discussion is needed.

If we are going to attract the best and the brightest to be LTEs and have them continue to teach in a progressive way, more needs to be done. We cannot rely on LTEs world-wide to make the extraordinary sacrifices our participants have made. For example, they should not have to rely on friends to keep them updated on new curriculum developments. We should not build a system in HE that relies on the ‘super teacher educator’, one who has incredible determination and stamina. We need sensible induction programmes for new LTEs that show them how to create a synergy between teaching and research. We need schools of education to recognise how labour-intensive it is to conduct research in schools. We need department leaders to lead by example in recognising the important work of LTEs and value them in their universities. One LTE cannot overcome student teachers’ view that all they need is a steady diet of practical strategies. This requires a coherent programme that immerses student teachers in a culture that disrupts their views and then helps them acquire the skills to be effective teachers; LTEs need to be part of a team, all pulling in much the same direction.

In conclusion, LTEs are the nexus point for literacy education; they determine how government curriculum is included in teacher education; guide students in unpacking their previous experiences; work in in-service courses; and conduct research. Unfortunately many of the demands on them are invisible to student teachers and colleagues not involved in teacher education. Their voices need to be heard because they bridge theory and practice; they are ideally suited to be leaders in education.

In future writing we will consider professional development needs and opportunities for literacy/English teacher educators; differences (e.g. backgrounds, approaches to work) among the teacher educators in the four countries; and pedagogical approach to their literacy courses. In next phase of the research some of the topics we will explore are the impact of the changing systems for teacher educations (e.g. alternative certification programmes; School Direct in the UK); and the use of multiliteracies theory and pedagogy in courses.
Acknowledgements
We wish to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their generous funding of this project.

References


