

## GUEST AUTHOR

In every edition of *Research in Teacher Education* we publish a contribution from a guest writer who has links with the Cass School of Education and Communities. In this month's edition of *RI TE* we are fortunate to have not one but three! **Clare Kosnik** is Director of the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT). Her area of research is teacher

education which she has systematically studied. She is now conducting a large-scale study of 28 literacy/English teacher educators in four countries.

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# We thought we knew the landscape of literacy teacher education: ten surprises from our research

Clare Kosnik, Lydia Menna and Pooja Dharamshi

We have been conducting the study *Literacy/English teacher educators: their backgrounds, visions, and practices* which includes 28 literacy/English teacher educators (LTEs) in four countries: Canada, the United States, England and Australia. As LTEs ourselves we naively believed we had a sense of the landscape of literacy/English teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Wold et al., 2011; Kirst & Pytash 2015) and the challenges faced by teacher educators (Furlong, 2013; Ellis et al., 2014); however, the research process revealed that our views were limited by our own frame of reference. We have reported the findings of our research in a number of papers and book chapters (Kosnik et al. 2013, 2015a, b, 2016) but this paper describes some findings that were astounding.

The research consisted of three interviews conducted either face-to-face or via Skype over a two-year period.

The first interview included five parts: background experiences; qualities (in their view) of an effective literacy educator; identity (eg their academic community); turning points in their career (personal and professional); and research activities. The second interview had four parts: framework and goals for their literacy course(s); pedagogies used and reasons for using them; assignments and readings; and how and why their views and practices have changed over the years. The third interview focused on use of digital technology and future plans.

The first level of analysis, 'open coding', was used to examine properties of the data (Creswell & Miller 2000) by identifying salient words and phrases, relating to the research questions and any other category or theme, which were emerging. During the open coding process, transcripts were first coded by hand then imported into NVivo, a qualitative research software,

for further analysis. The next step was axial coding followed by running queries. As a team we examined our list of codes to identify ones that came as a complete surprise, and identifying ten that are discussed below.

## 1. WILLINGNESS TO BE PART OF THE RESEARCH

We initially sent invitations to five LTEs and then used 'snowball sampling' to recruit more participants whereby some LTEs who had accepted the invitation suggested a colleague who might be interested. Punch (2014) describes snowball sampling as identifying 'cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich' (p. 163). After reviewing the suggested individuals' faculty profiles on their university websites to ensure they were teaching literacy they were invited to be participants. Although almost all

were new to us we were shocked at their willingness to be part of the research. Only six declined our invitation, was and then not due to lack of interest; rather, they were no longer teaching in teacher education programmes (eg they had moved into administrative roles). Most had heavy teaching responsibilities, research agendas and administrative roles yet found time for three interviews. A comment repeatedly made in the 74 interviews was: ‘No one has ever asked my opinion before.’ After the interviews we sent a thank you email to participants, who invariably sent us a return email thanking us for taking the time to hear their views.

Name (pseudonym)	Early life experience	Priorities as a teacher educator
Giovanni	Grandfather was migrant worker	Working with newcomer population through a church-based group and appreciating out-of-school literacy practices
Pietro	Labelled with a learning disability	Helping student teachers not to label children and appreciate the learning the children bring into the class
Martha Ann	Grandmother and aunt read with her	Valuing children’s literature
Maya	Was ESL (English as a second language) and placed in a low-track class	Emphasised appreciating children’s home literacies and understanding the connection between language and power

Table 1: Influence of early life experiences

## 2. INFLUENCE OF EARLY LIFE EXPERIENCES

In our first interview we asked participants to construct a timeline of turning points in their careers. Our assumption was they would begin with their work as teachers or with their doctoral studies. This was not the case. Almost all started with their early childhood, identifying an experience that shaped them as both teachers and teacher educators. As we ran queries through NVivo we could identify a clear connection between these early life experiences and the goals for the literacy courses. See Table 1 for examples.

The influence of early life experiences led us to conclude – you teach who you are.

## 3. IDENTIFICATION WITH THE DISCIPLINE OF LITERACY/ENGLISH

Identity is a key part of any profession (Gee 2000; Jenkins 2006). When asked to choose from a list of terms the LTEs would use to describe themselves many chose the term literacy/English professor. (See Table 2 for other terms.) Those who selected teacher educator added the caveat that teacher educators were seen as ‘second-class’ academics and there was a hierarchy in their department/school of education, with those most closely connected to schooling being less valued.

Teacher educator	17
Literacy/English professor	15
Teacher	14
Professor	3
Teacher trainer	1

Table 2

This finding about identity led us to probe their academic community. Most identified literacy or English education organisations (not teacher education) as their academic community, with most having their community beyond their own institution, including literacy organisations and scholars of colour associations. Only two of the LTEs identified teacher education groups. Most preferred to

attend discipline-specific rather than teacher education related conferences. Having to be part of many communities – academic, professional, own university – was demanding.

## 4. POLITICALISATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Beginning with the first interview the issue of politics and politicalisation of teacher education was pervasive and prevalent. Given that Canada does not have a central department of education (each province has its own department) and teacher educators still have a fair degree of flexibility and latitude we were overwhelmed hearing about the negative impact politics was having on teacher educators. Six of the ten English and Australian teacher educators were opting for early retirement or teaching only in the doctoral programme because they could not face the reviews by governmental organisations or having to teach to the National Curriculum. Justin felt that ‘the formation of teachers [being] policed through a single set of Teacher Standards’ (2016: 36) was decreasing teacher educator autonomy and authority.

Stella, director of a teacher education programme, described the high stakes of an Ofsted visit:

*‘I’ve become more aware of pressures on me... to make sure that what I do is going to be compliant or not found wanting of any of kind of Ofsted regulation... they could say our course [programme] didn’t fit the bill and that would be curtains [for the programme]. And that’s terrifying.’*

We were shocked that the English government determines the content for literacy courses in teacher education, requiring teacher educators to focus on how to teach nineteenth-century texts to adolescents and how to teach synthetic phonics to the exclusion of other forms of learning to read. Consequently, inclusion of digital pedagogies has almost vanished from the National Curriculum. Similarly, in Australia children’s literacy and the arts are

disappearing from the formal curriculum. In the United States, Educational Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) has become a source of tension for both student teachers and teacher educators.

### 5. NEED TO MAINTAIN MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

The literature on transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator has made the case quite convincingly that new teacher educators experience challenges regarding knowledge and identity (Murray & Male 2005; Murray 2016). Since 27 or our 28 participants were conducting research in schools they had to maintain a semblance of their teacher identity. This meant they had to hold multiple identities (teacher, researcher, academic), which was demanding. Caterina noted, ‘Student teachers want to see me as a teacher. As soon as I start telling a story about my experiences as a classroom teacher they perk up.’ Although no longer classroom teachers, many LTEs felt they needed to maintain ties with teacher groups. Chester stated his dilemma as:

‘If I go to Literacy or English Teachers conferences, I know lots of people there and I’ve known them for a long time. I’m still in fact the nice guy who’s got some good ideas of things to do with children’s books. But do not think I want to do that sort of thing some more [but I have to maintain these relationships].’

Many felt a level of conflict among these multiple identities, with one noting, ‘I do not want to be a glorified teacher who has been transplanted to higher education.’ The closer you are to school teaching the less valued your research. One participant bemoaned, ‘Colleagues feel that research done in schools is inferior.’

### 6. VARIETY OF DELIVERY METHODS OF COURSES

Having studied different teacher education programmes (Beck & Kosnik 2006) and attended many international conferences, we thought we were knowledgeable about programme structure. Not so!

As we interviewed LTEs in Australia and England we learned about the structure of large-scale lectures followed by smaller tutorials. This meant that there had to be collaboration among LTEs regarding who would give the main lecture, the topic, the content and format for the tutorials. This is not common practice in Canada, where tutorials and large lectures are not the norm. In Canada when asked about collaboration none of the eight participants felt there was collaboration, whereas the level of collaboration was higher in the other three countries.

### 7. LACK OF STUDENT TEACHER INTEREST IN THEIR RESEARCH

To gain a full picture of our participants we inquired about their current research activities. One major surprise was that few shared their research agenda or findings with their student teachers. Many commented that their student teachers ‘were not interested’ in them as researchers. ‘Student teachers are more interested that I was a classroom

teacher than that I have a PhD.’ One LTE commented that when she gave her student teachers a reading that she had published there was total surprise, with some questioning, ‘you do research?’. This revealed how narrow the student teachers’ view is of their instructor. And further, given that research consumes a great deal of time, is valued by the university but not valued by their student teachers, many felt caught between two worlds.

### 8. VARIETY OF PEDAGOGIES

Our second interview focused on pedagogy and without a doubt we were astounded at the sheer creativity of the LTEs. Their thoughtfulness and ingenuity were humbling. Table 5 shows the goals for their courses.

Although all LTEs had knowledge of literacy as their primary goal, their interpretation of literacy varied tremendously: some like Melissa, Dominique and Maya focused on critical literacy, while Amelia and Jessie had multiliteracies as the framework for

Goals for course	Number who identified this goal
Build knowledge of literacy	28
Build knowledge of pedagogy	25
Student teachers adopt a professional role	18
Student teachers develop a critical stance	16
Build knowledge of government initiatives	13
Build knowledge of digital technology	11
Focus on student teacher growth	10

Table 5: Goals for courses

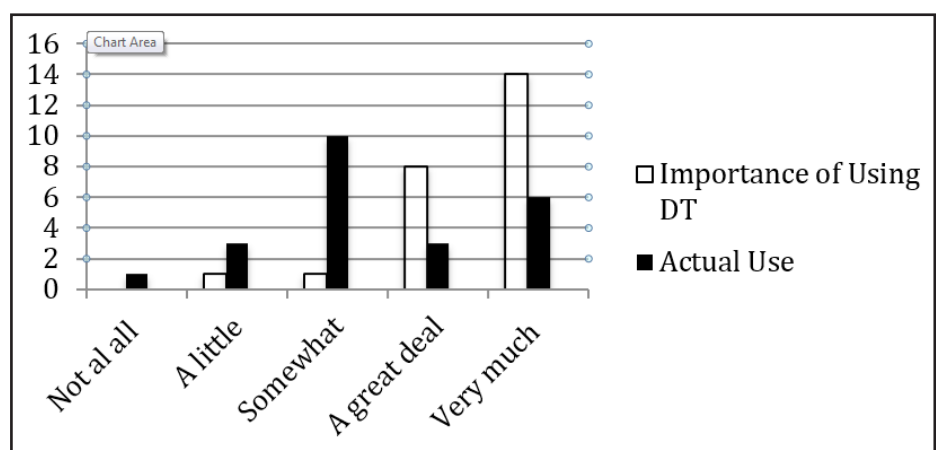


Table 6: Importance of and use of digital technology.

their courses. Jane and Lance focused on children's literature, while Sharon and Margie had the writing process as their priority. One LTE focused her course totally on phonics and phonological awareness. Justin commented, 'I see our work as being about the development of teachers as public intellectuals... not simply to prepare beginning teachers for whatever the particular curricular or pedagogic demands of policy here now are but for a lifetime in teaching and this involves them being able to be both critical of initiatives that are thrust on them and creative in their approaches.' The variability in literacy methods courses (content and pedagogy) in teacher education is both astounding and alarming because student teachers have markedly different experiences.

The third interview, which focused on digital technology, was the area of least consistency. Although most agreed that digital technology was important their actual use varied tremendously. See Table 6.

The few LTEs who were keen adopters of digital technology used it extensively, but most importantly used it to transform their teaching and the student teachers' learning; make literacy classes participatory; gain an understanding of the increasingly globalised nature of literacy; and reframe issues related to literacy and literacy teaching. Many, though, expressed trepidation about using digital technology.

Although student teachers are supposed digital natives their conceptions of literacy were traditional – seeing reading and writing as discrete sets of skills and wanting to teach as they were taught. This in turn required LTEs to help student teachers 'unlearn'. Many had student teachers do a literacy autobiography to help them uncover their biases and filters, which would help them prepare to teach in diverse classrooms.

## 9. FRUSTRATION WITH STUDENT TEACHERS

Although our participants were from four countries, with some teaching in undergraduate programmes and others in graduate teacher education programmes, there were common issues regarding student teachers. Their similar frustrations with student teachers were astounding: lack of interest in learning theory, complaints about associate (cooperating/mentor) teachers, and a focus on the practical.

Lortie's (1975) identification of the apprenticeship of observation was still relevant regardless of the level of the programme (undergraduate or graduate). Sara, who teaches in a graduate level programme, voiced her frustration about student teachers' lack of interest in a tutoring programme she had set up to work with high needs children:

'Even though I also believe it's a great model, there is a lot of resistance still from pre-service teachers... [they say] "I want to go to a lecture and I want to go to a tutorial and I want to have a textbook... And I want it all there... why do I have to go out to a school?"... so even though you think this is a really great model there is some resistance from students themselves.'

Given the time spent on course preparation and commitment we wondered why student teachers were generally not more content.

## 10. NEED FOR A PEDAGOGY OF LITERACY TEACHER EDUCATION

As we analysed the data it became evident that we need to go beyond a pedagogy of teacher education. We have been highly influenced by the work of Loughran (2006) and Kennedy (2016) regarding the need for a pedagogy of teacher education, but we now realise we need to go beyond that to create

discipline-specific pedagogies (Shulman 1986; Eisner 1997). This would provide LTEs with a 'road map' to their literacy courses while leaving room to integrate their own views, interests, experiences and contextualised practices. This led us to conclude that we may need a paradigm shift in teacher education where there is pedagogy of teacher education for each discipline (eg literacy, mathematics).

Our learning through this research cannot be quantified or overestimated. All LTEs should have the opportunity to step outside their university and context to hear from others. Further, teacher educators should be given opportunities to share their views and opinions because they have key knowledge. ■

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