

**Research in the Work of New Zealand Teacher Educators:
A CHAT Perspective.**

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Abstract

In this article we use Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to explore the place of research in the work of New Zealand university-based teacher educators (TEs). We consider how aspirations for a research-informed initial teacher education (ITE) are served by New Zealand universities' recruitment practices and TE's actual work. We suggest that TEs value scholarship that informs their practice and are motivated to research, despite working within institutions where employment practices are bifurcating the teacher educator (TE) workforce along lines of who can and should do research and who should not. We cite evidence from interviews to suggest TEs, and those in leadership positions who have been involved in TE recruitment, recognize the importance of research to inform practice and teaching. However, this conflicts with the language of advertisements and job descriptions where for some TE roles, the practice of research and scholarship are not an object of work. In response, we encourage those responsible for TE work force development to support and employ TEs able to engage in high standards of scholarship and teaching, and in so doing provide their students with research- and practice-informed teaching.

Keywords: initial teacher education, Teacher Educators, Cultural Historical Activity Theory, research-informed teaching, Performance-based Research Fund (PBRF).

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Introduction

Teaching, research, and scholarship are central to the work and success of New Zealand's universities. University-based teacher educators (TEs) work in a policy environment that encourages and rewards research output and where research is an important source of external funding. However, those within university departments of education responsible for the education of new teachers also operate in an initial teacher education (ITE) environment that is funded by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and is subject to programme approval by the national professional body for teachers: Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (ECANZ). This body requires that university-based TEs involved in assessment of student teacher practice in professional settings (schools or early childhood centres) must have teacher registration and a practicing certificate (ECANZ, 2015). Furthermore, ECANZ's approval criteria for ITE programmes require TEs to be research active. In this study we use cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to explore the place and object of research for TEs whose work straddles these two activity systems (Higher Education (HE) and ITE). We suggest that university-based ITE (UBITE) offers opportunities to through research to generate new knowledge about and for teaching, that serves the needs of the profession, by building partnerships and informing practice. However, we also argue that a number of challenges must be met for this to happen. Not the least of these is that leaders of university departments of education must reconcile competing demands for the generation of research funding while maintaining ITE programmes of the highest quality.

1.1. Context.

New Zealand (NZ), while geographically remote, has a government that is politically and philosophically close to the heart of world trends focused on improving educational outcomes. Consequently, discussion here is likely to resonate with international audiences. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other international assessments of student achievement have been of significant interest to NZ's politicians and media alike. Despite NZ's overall success, concern is evident about the need to address what has been called NZ's 'long tail of underachievement' (Clark, 2014). A visit in 2013 from Andreas Schleicher, 'The OECD's PISA delivery man' (Wilby, 2013), at the invitation of the Minister of Education, underlined the alignment of NZ's aspirations and those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Both hold that education is a major driver for economic growth and national prosperity and agree that reform is needed to bring about the high quality teaching necessary for student achievement (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010; OECD, 2005). Of particular note is a drive to adopt the practices of so-called top performing school systems, such as those in Finland and Singapore, whose students achieve very highly in PISA. Nevertheless, questions remain to be answered as to how nations best bring about high quality teaching.

NZ, like Finland and Singapore, has followed world trends and moved much of its ITE into universities. Indeed, over the last two decades its universities have merged with the previous six independent state-funded colleges of education, a movement also seen in countries such as Norway, South Africa, and Australia (Hill & Haigh, 2012). Gunn, Berg, Hill, and Haigh (2015) noted that this transition has

expanded the role of TEs to embrace both practice and scholarship as significant objects of their work. This expansion presents opportunities and challenges for TEs, for ITE, and for the broader domain of education. A central object of UBITE is research. Opportunities include bridging the research-practice gap and the formation of strong partnerships between universities and the profession to build and test new knowledge. A major challenge however is the possible double bind of universities' needing to respond to both the policy environment of HE and the policy and professional requirements of teaching.

1.2. Opportunities.

Teacher Educators in NZ have traditionally been professional experts recruited through what Davey (2013) has called the 'practitioner pathway' (p. 47), as a result of their school or early childhood education-based expertise and experience. A major object of their work has been teaching and the rules mediating that work have had a strong teaching and ITE student support focus. Middleton (2009) described TEs in the former NZ colleges of education as prioritising service roles to the teaching profession. Equipped with deep understandings of professional settings, these TEs were potentially well placed to become consumers and producers of insightful educational research when mergers occurred. Once equipped to research as well as to teach, they would be able to engage in the full scope of the work of UBITE. A dually-qualified TE (qualified to teach in schools and to research) is able to act in both the professional and scholarly domains of teaching and ITE. This is important as ITE in NZ, as elsewhere, has been blighted by the so-called theory – practice gap. Loughran (2011) suggests that this gap is 'an abiding issue in education' (p. 280) and highlights the conflicting identities of the professional expert and the theoretician. Further, he

challenges TEs to address the ‘endemic uncertainty of knowledge of practice’ by engaging in ‘explication of their pedagogy of teacher education’ (2011, p. 290). Cochran-Smith (2003) makes a similar call, arguing that TEs should be research-informed active enquirers. These scholars’ calls, if heeded, serve to expand the traditional objects of TE’s work, a movement that Hill and Haigh (2012) reported as a concerted effort to build a body of teacher education scholarship in NZ.

However, not all agree that research and scholarship are necessary components of TE’s work, as is evident in trends toward school-based initial teacher ‘training’ in England (Roberts & Foster, 2015). In contrast to the English approach, ITE in Finland is embedded deeply in research. This is significant. Finland is one of the OECD’s highly rated education systems and the only education system classified as ‘excellent’ in the influential report, *How the world’s best performing school systems keep getting better* produced by McKinsey and Company (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barbour, 2010). Toom et al. (2010) explain how research fits in the Finnish model:

First, the study programme is structured according to the systematic analysis of education. Secondly, all teaching is based on research. Third, activities are organised in such way that students can practise argumentation, decision-making and justification while investigating and solving pedagogical problems. Fourth, students learn academic research skills....

Students should come to identify the structure and quality of their own conceptions of teaching during their studies by reflecting on their experiences and through theoretical studies. (p. 333)

It can be argued that such an approach prepares teachers to respond to future as well as current circumstances of teaching and offers a pragmatic response to accelerated change in the world of education and knowledge. University-based ITE offers the

potential to support the development of a responsive teaching profession. Well-prepared, research-savvy teachers, educated by research active and practice experienced TEs are able to engage with the contradictions that abound in the complex and messy world of education.

1.3. Challenges.

New Zealand UBITE straddles two policy environments: HE and ITE. Each of these environments can be viewed as an activity system in its own right, with its own rules, tools, subjects, communities, objects and outcomes, and divisions of labour. University-based ITE, for instance, is subject to programme approval by the teaching professional body: ECANZ. In order for university ITE programmes to be approved, they must be staffed partially by TEs who can undertake the work of practicum visiting, mentoring, and assessing ITE students within professional settings. To do this work, TEs themselves must be registered and hold a current practising certificate – which presumes they have a teaching qualification. These professional credentials must be renewed every three years and require evidence of being “fit to teach”, of having “completed satisfactory professional development”, of “completed satisfactory recent teaching service”, and “have been meaningfully assessed against and meeting the *Practising Teacher Criteria*” (ECANZ, 2015). Such requirements have significant implications for those in leadership of university departments of education and must be considered in matters such as staffing, timetabling, and the provision of professional development opportunities.

However, NZs universities have not been immune to the institutional shaping that research quality evaluations have caused internationally (Middleton, 2009) and academic leaders must also respond to these. In NZ, such evaluation is enacted in the

form of the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF). The PBRF provides funding for tertiary education providers based upon a research excellence evaluation. The NZ Government aims when introducing PBRF included to:

- increase the average quality of research
- ensure that research continues to support degree and postgraduate teaching
- underpin the research strength in the tertiary education system

(Smart, 2013, p. 2)

To a large extent the PBRF shares much with its overseas equivalents such as those in England and Australia. However, its point of difference is that it measures the research quality of individuals rather than departments (Smart, 2013). The competitive high-stakes environment that has resulted from its realization has meant more than inter-university reputational hierarchies are at stake. In Gunn et al. (2015) we have argued that this may substantially shape the construction, by universities, of the work of TEs as they seek to manage the requirements of ECANZ and the PBRF policy environment. Here we consider the place of research in the work of TEs and ask to what extent the rules and objects of the UBITE activity system, shaped by universities' response to PBRF and other institutional priorities, contribute to aspirations for research-informed and collaborative practice in ITE.

2. Method/ Methodology

Using tools of CHAT, we have scrutinised the language of job descriptions, and advertisements, and analysed interviews of those responsible for the recruitment of TEs to university positions, to establish how the object of research is constructed within UBITE. Further, using data from semi-structured interviews with TEs, we

examined how they described the place and nature of research in their work. Our analysis has allowed us to explore the place of research in the work of NZ university-based TEs and to consider how aspirations for research-informed ITE is served by NZ universities' recruitment practices and TE's actual work.

Following work in England and Scotland by Ellis, Blake, McNicholl and McNally (2011) and Australia by Nuttall, Brennan, Zipin, Tuinamuana, and Cameron (2013), we undertook a two-part study: *The Work of TEs – New Zealand (WoTE-NZ)*. This study engages with CHAT, a theoretical perspective that originated in Vygotsky's work and later was turned to activity systems analysis by Engeström (2001) to understand human activity within complex collective learning environments. This method can reveal contradictions, which Engeström describes as “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (p. 137). Using this perspective we can observe how the addition of new elements to an activity system can result in a collision with existing elements.

Thus, in the first phase of our work, we examined the ‘cultural-historical production and maintenance of the category of academic worker, “TE”’ (Gunn et al., 2015) within the activity system of HE. In the current paper we revisit these data to consider the place of research in organizational representations of TE's work. In the second phase of our study, following McNicholl and Blake (2013), we considered how the work of TEs relates to the academic world in which it is situated. For the purposes of this paper, we used interview data from TEs to examine the place and focus of research in their work. Thus, here, we bring together analyses from phase one and phase two data to consider the place of research within the work of TEs in UBITE.

2.1. Data gathering.

2.1.1. Phase one.

Over a six month period spanning October 2013, to March 2014, a national university recruitment website and institutional websites were monitored to allow the collection of advertisements and person/position descriptions for education faculty positions in NZ universities that offer ITE programmes. Thirty-seven were identified. Of these, 11 positions from six universities were identified as being related to ITE. Personnel named in the job advertisements were contacted and invited to take part in telephone interviews. Seven interviews, ranging from 20 to 40 minutes were conducted, audio-recorded and transcribed. A structured interview guide, incorporating lead questions and follow up probes was used, for example, “When you drafted the further particulars for the post(s), what were your priorities?”, and “Were there also institutional priorities?”. Participants were asked to discuss the circumstances of the recruitment need, the development of the recruitment documents, the nature of the role they sought to fill, and the attributes and skills that a successful applicant would need to demonstrate.

2.1.2. Phase two.

In late 2014 and early 2015, a purposive sample of 15 TEs, representing early childhood, primary, and secondary teaching sectors and one-year teacher education programmes, were recruited from two NZ universities. At East University the 16 TEs who were teaching in one ITE programme were invited to participate, of these 11 accepted and eight were selected, ensuring cross-sectorial representation. At West University, 25 TEs were invited to participate; seven accepted, all were selected to participate. No incentives for participation were offered. The participant TEs had varied experience and management responsibility. They were invited to participate in several data collection activities:

- Initial telephone interviews (in which professional life histories were generated and views about their work shared).
- Work diaries.
- Work shadowing observations.

Interview data from both phases, as well as recruitment advertisements and associated documents were brought together for analysis (see 2.2. below).

2.2 Data analysis.

2.2.1. Phase one data analysis

In phase one, following Ellis, McNicholl and Pendry (2012), we employed membership categorisation analysis (MCA), an analysis of word frequencies and key words in context, and a linguistic annotation strategy to examine documents. We borrowed our questions from the Nuttall et al. (2013) Australian study:

- (1) What is the work these texts are trying to do?
- (2) What kind of person is described in these texts?
- (3) What can be interpreted about the context in which these texts were produced?
- (4) What contradictions are evident within and between texts?

For this paper we revisited texts associated with eight of the advertised positions (those from institutions where university/ college mergers had occurred) and re-examined them to ask:

- (1) To what extent is the work of scholarship and research evident?
- (2) What rules mediate TE's research and scholarly activity?

- (3) How are the objects of research and scholarship mediated within the activity system?

2.2.2. Phase two data analysis

In Phase two we have analysed talk from interviews and situated discussions, produced representations of work dimensions from work diaries, and used CHAT to examine object motives in teaching and learning activities from work shadowing. The purposes of these analyses have been to gain a better understanding of the practical work involved in UBITE.

For this paper the interviews with TEs were read, with CHAT tools, for how participants talked about the place and object of research in their work. We asked:

- (1) To what extent is the work of scholarship and research evident in the reported practices of these participants?
- (2) What is the ‘object motive’ (purpose) of participation in scholarship and research in the work of these TEs and how is it mediated?
- (3) What place does scholarship and research have in the professional representations of TEs? (How is it valued by them?)

3. Results

In Gunn et al. (2015) we identified three major constructions of TE in NZ universities; these comprised the professional expert, the dually-qualified, and the traditional academic. Here, we discuss the place and object of research in TE’s work using these constructions as a way to structure the discussion. Assigned names are

used for universities: North, South, West, City, and Central (phase one) and East and West Universities (phase two – only West university featured in both phases of our study). The geographic nomenclatures were assigned and do not necessarily relate to the geographic location of the institution. Similarly, pseudonyms are used for the participants in the study. As the sample is small we have written to protect the identity of the participants by assigning names that are gender non-specific and avoiding the use of gender specific pronouns.

3.1. The Research Object and the Professional Expert.

We describe this category of TE as being one who is qualified to teach (in early childhood education or in the schooling sector) and having no requirement to research as part of the university-based TE role. Three of eight positions in our data set of recruitment materials were for professional experts. Two were named ‘Senior Tutors’ (North and South Universities) the other, ‘Professional Practice Fellow’ (West University). For the two Senior Tutor positions, the advertisements and position documents were devoid of research as an object of the work. Rules of work evident in the job description for the Professional Practice Fellow however, were to ‘Maintain an awareness of research developments in the field’ and to ‘Assist other academic staff in the development of their own research programmes by bringing a practice perspective’ (West University, Job Description). When asked about these elements of the advertised position at West University, the person responsible explained that there were clear pathways of employment there:

...and then we also have another category called professional practice fellows, which was what that job ad is, and professional practice fellows don't have to do any research, they don't have a component of that, so that's particularly

those that we need who have that recent classroom practice that perhaps haven't got that umm higher education sort of research basis to bring to it ...

(Person responsible, West University).

The West University manager's account provides insight into a division of labour within the ITE workforce: research work is only supported within some roles.

Contradictions in relation to the research object within this category of TE were identified. The recruitment materials were clear that research was not part of the work being sought; nevertheless the importance of research to the employing institutions was evident. For example, one manager described research experience as "a bonus" (South University).

The second phase of our study involved four participants from East University who were working in positions of the professional expert type. Two of these TEs had recently experienced a job reclassification, which had resulted in the withdrawal of workload for research as part of their work activities. They shared that they had, until recently, been on a full academic pathway (involving teaching, research and service work), but were now working in teaching only positions. Sawyer explained, 'I was not at a stage where I would be able to...meet the requirements of publishing the research'. Despite the lack of institutional support for research, the TEs remained actively engaged in research, three of them by way of completion of doctorates.

These professional expert TEs all valued research its utility in supporting effective teaching within ITE. For example, Bailey explained, 'My thesis work will feed into First Year programmes' and Cas described a research project that was examining 'the way I teach a particular (subject name) topic with my grads'. The participants' studies were deeply connected with their work – the personal rules of which demonstrated the commitment to research they as individuals held. Cas for instance

reflected: "... every bit of research I read, I think... My god, that's going to make a difference to kids in the classroom..." Despite clear evidence that research that informed teaching was a clear object of these TEs, several contradictions within the UBITE activity system concerning research were evident. Sawyer's job description excluded research, yet Sawyer was subject to an agreed annual appraisal goal of publishing an article. Cas discussed jointly 'writing up' an inter-departmental research project with a colleague who, unlike Cas, had research time in workload. Furthermore, it was expected that participants should use research, but were to some degree prevented from engaging with it as part of their daily work. Cameron shared:

I think we work in an environment where we are constantly asked to ...use research to make sure we are really at the cutting edge and at the same time constraints around funding and workload don't make that easy...

Cas and Sawyer each identified a perceived contradiction described by Sawyer as 'Catch 22', where they spoke of how funding was available to them to attend conferences, if they were presenting, but in order to present they needed to have conducted research, an activity outside of their job description. Conferences provided valuable opportunities for engaging with research for the purposes of professional development, but also because they offered opportunities to network and engage with research communities. This was significant, as two of the participants lamented the difficulty they had experienced in breaking into research groups. Cas developed this theme:

I think that goes nationally as well... a couple of colleagues have been asked to contribute chapters for books and things that are being written, now if you don't go to the conference ..., you miss out on that opportunity.

The professional experts in this study valued research and worked to mitigate the effects of a lack of institutional support for it.

3.2. The Research Object and the Dually-qualified TE.

Only one of eight TE positions from phase one of our study was recruiting someone to a position that required the prospective TE to be dually-qualified. Here, Central University sought a TE who could engage in the full scope of UBITE work – research, service and professional practice. The dually qualified category of TE is:

...one who is an effective (school or early childhood) teacher with high enthusiasm and resilience, good community linkages and who can also engage in research and scholarship activities as they practice research-informed tertiary teaching and knowledge generation in their respective field. (Gunn et al., 2015, p. 8)

The recruitment documentation for this position placed a strong emphasis on both teaching and research. Indeed, a prerequisite of the post was current teacher registration and key job outcomes were to ‘produce and contribute to research’, contribute to the ‘publication output of the School and Faculty’, ‘participate in appropriate research projects’, and maintain ‘a publication record’.

Eight of our phase two TEs were dually-qualified and working in positions that required them to teach (including within professional settings where they would supervise and assess student teachers in practice), research, and undertake service. A range of perspectives about research was evident in their interviews. Riley described research as a personal and institutional priority; explaining, “(My) responsibility is to be a researcher” noting the “demands of the University - first and foremost is about research outputs...” At the time of the interview, Riley was new to the post. Riley

described the nature of the work as highly research focused. In response to this the interviewer asked if she was right in interpreting Riley's priority as being research. Riley responded that teaching and research were equal priorities. In contrast, Brook, an experienced colleague, shared a rule that Senior Lecturers were expected to "write five articles per two years..." and described working on research projects from 11.15 pm to 12.45 am at night because it was impossible to find time free from constant interruptions in the working day. Brook shared that being a TE was like having "two full time jobs": one as a teacher and one as a researcher. At the time of the interview, due to teaching and visiting commitments, it would not be possible for Brook to undertake any research work in the following four weeks. Ash, another dually-qualified TE held a leadership position and described an institutional expectation as "promoting research in ITE..." Despite also being an active researcher, talk of leadership and teaching work dominated the discussion.

These participants, like their professional expert colleagues, described doing research that was directly related to their teaching work as university-based TEs. Riley explained, "I think...research informing teaching is quite an interesting position to be in and...that's good there's this cross over...they're not separate things actually". Nevertheless, there was evidence that pursuit of the object of research within the activity system of UBITE was driven by the needs of universities, not least in Brook's discussion of the requirement to publish a set number of articles, but also in Ash's response to being asked who controls the work of TEs. Ash answered, "...the broader policy environment, so things like PBRF imperatives".

3.3. The Research Object and the Traditional Academic.

In Gunn et al., we noted that this category of TE within the university was also constructed in a manner reflective of non-TE university academics in general. That is, this type of TE was expected to be research active, but not to be professionally credentialed. Four positions seeking traditional academic type TEs were identified in phase one. Two were being recruited by Central University while North University and City University advertised one such position each. As might be expected, there was a very strong emphasis on research as an object of the work in the documentation and interviews for these positions. Indeed, job descriptions contained generic language used for academic positions across disciplines and signalled research designed to serve the needs of the institution as a priority. This was evident in the requirement that candidates have “successful experience of generating external funding” (North University). City University expected that a successful candidate would “enhance the Institute's teaching and research profile nationally and internationally”; whereas, Central University required an applicant with “an established research reputation in education research”. Similarly, North University highlighted the importance of “international recognition” for the senior position they were seeking to fill. The manager at City University who was responsible for creating the advertisement for the role explained how the research imperative was shaping employment practice:

... so some of the people we are bringing in would not necessarily have familiarity with the NZ context, they would be from overseas, but they would come with freshly minted PhDs and very good research training...and they contribute to (us) be(coming) a high research performing institute of education.

This theme was also evident in the interview with the manager responsible for the North University position. The manager noted, “the kinds of people we would

want to appoint would be ones who are potentially outstanding researchers as opposed to (those) coming with a well developed professional record as teachers and educators.” Research pedigree, as required for institutional success in PBRF, was a prerequisite of these posts with a clear activity system rules designed to build the reputation of the institutions.

Despite the institutional discourse, there was evidence that the managers responsible for these positions saw the object of research as greater than just serving their institutions needs. For example, the manager at North University expected that the candidate should “be doing research and engaged in research related to teaching ... and need to have a profile within the community...” When asked specifically about the role of TEs, the interviewee suggested that TEs should:

Contribute to the body of research that informs teaching practice... and also engage with our community so we can draw those links between those people who are currently teaching in schools and their professional development as life-long learners and educators... (Person responsible, North University)

The manager at City University also identified the importance of educational research:

The predominant focus of UBITE will be two-fold, one it will be to continue to develop research-based knowledge and to disseminate research-based knowledge, good quality research-based knowledge about what works for kids and teachers in classrooms and centres, but secondly, the new role will be to work very closely with exemplary school and centre based educators, in a partnership....

All “traditional academic” type positions required that applicants had a strong research history and research capability. The documentation supporting each post

made direct reference to the need to bring research funding to the institution. However, outside the interviews, reference to a requirement to conduct research that would support teacher education was limited.

Only one of our phase two participants, Chris, was identified as working in a role of the traditional academic type. Chris was an experienced academic, but also a very experienced teacher whose career trajectory had moved from being a schoolteacher, to former college of education (pre-university-merger) based professional expert, to dually-qualified TE who was presently working in a role akin to the TE category of traditional academic. The pressures of functioning at a high level of institutional leadership and research activity had recently resulted in Chris needing to withdraw from visiting of ITE students during their school based experience. In addition to extensive leadership responsibility, teaching and supervision, Chris identified research as being an important work activity. A current major research project Chris was involved in built on Chris' strong personal teaching history and relationships with schools. Chris has served as an editor of several international journals. Mentoring emerging researchers was identified as a further object of Chris' work and involved leading a group of emerging academics and providing opportunities for them to publish.

3.4. Summary of findings

Our analysis of the phase one findings revealed research to be an object of the work of some institutionally-constituted TE categories, but not others. For those roles that officially included research, the rules of research work were generally consistent with those that might be expected from any university department, and major motivations were to build the reputation of the university and to win research funding.

However, managers responsible for recruiting TEs identified a further outcome of research within university-based ITE: research that informed teaching and served the profession. Interviews with TEs in phase two of our study showed that all of them valued research and were engaged in it. This included TEs whose employment contracts and work designations denied them work time to research. Interviews with those responsible for the recruitment materials in phase one revealed tensions of building the research capability of their institutions and meeting the professional expectations of ECANZ. Two themes were evident in our consideration of an object motive for this research work: firstly, the desire to inform practice and secondly, to satisfy institutional rules.

4. Discussion

In this section we identify the contradictions that our activity systems analysis of UBITE and TEs work has shown and discuss why these are important. We speculate that these contradictions may be brought about as unintended consequences of the PBRF as universities work to maximise the research funding they can attract while also striving to meeting the needs of UBITE. Next, we discuss the significance of the object of research in the work of the TEs in second phase of our study. We conclude by noting that research as an object within the activity system of UBITE is one that the NZ government, universities, ECANZ, and TEs all claim to value and yet in practice only some TEs are supported to do it. We see this as a major systemic contradiction that must be addressed by NZs universities and government, and call for more sustainable and long-term approaches to UBITE.

This paper has sought to examine the place of research within the activity system of UBITE through an examination of teacher educators' work and university recruitment

practices. The predominance of UBITE in NZ has resulted from the mergers of the former colleges of education and universities. These mergers have brought together historically related, but distinct activity systems of university-based HE and ITE. Many NZ TEs, including some the participants in this study, have experienced a change in the rules, objects, tools, communities, and the division of labour as part of this transition. Furthermore, our examination of the activity system has highlighted major contradictions. Notably, the bifurcation of the workforce into practice expert and traditional academic tracks is resulting in work object of research being officially denied some TEs. This is despite an HE policy environment shaped by the PBRF that measures research outputs of all those responsible for teaching degree level programmes (Smart, 2013) and an ITE policy environment that demands TEs to be “encouraged and supported to be research active” (ECANZ, 2015). In 2012, Hill and Haigh reported that in NZ, “virtually all teacher educators (were) employed on academic contracts requiring them to undertake teaching, research, and service”(p. 975). From the data gathered in the first phase of our study, and from the interviews with participants in phase two, it appears that this may no longer be the case and that a bifurcation is occurring.

We consider this bifurcation to be problematic. Those who are most likely to be appointed to the research track are perhaps least likely to be professionally credentialed in a way that would see them able to work with student teachers in professional settings (teaching, assessing and supervising). This is evident in the phase one interviews with those responsible for recruitment, for example, North University sought ‘Potentially outstanding researchers as opposed to (those), coming with a well developed professional record as teachers and educators’. Furthermore, our study suggests that even those TEs who serve in dually-qualified roles involving

teaching and research may find their work redefined through restructuring or changes in job roles (such as leadership). These patterns of recruitment and restructuring are unlikely to serve well a UBITE system that seeks to bridge theory and practice and develop research-informed teaching.

If university-based TEs who work most closely with student teachers are excluded from producing and engaging with research, critics might reasonably ask what advantage do universities offer ITE over alternative options, such as school-based providers, whose TEs have current experience? If university-based TEs are encouraged to engage in research and practice, and are able to provide quality programmes involving partnerships within the profession, they, like their colleagues in countries such as Finland, will be well placed to provide a research-informed approach to teacher education that will provide excellent teachers who can reflect on and adapt practice according to the needs of individuals and groups.

We speculate that current patterns of recruitment together with the removal of support for research in the job designations of some TEs may result from the pressure on universities to increase their funding and to enhance their position in the PBRF. In the school sector, Gillborn and Youdell (2000) coin the phrase ‘educational triage’ to describe the practice of focusing on some students at the expense of others, depending on whether or not they are seen as having potential to enhance their school’s position in examination league table; it is possible something similar is happening in UBITE in NZ. Such an approach involves allocating research time and resources to those most likely to achieve well in the PBRF.

In the short term the universities’ practice may be a successful strategy for addressing the PBRF funding mechanisms while at the same time meeting the

professional requirements for ITE programme approval of regulatory bodies such as the ECANZ. Indeed with this approach, university departments of education can employ those who come with ‘freshly minted PhDs and very good research training’ (City University) and also those that ‘have that recent classroom practice’ (West University). However, this practice reifies the so-called theory-practice gap and may not be sustainable and in the longer-term interests of UBITE.

A major finding of our research is that all the participants in the second phase of our study were engaged in research. This is a point of difference to the findings of the UK WoTE study. McNicholl and Blake (2013) reported that:

In spite of expectations across higher education, photographs and descriptions of our participants’ bookshelves and workspaces revealed little or nothing of the paraphernalia of research. In what appears to be a primary contradiction of the work, research was an activity that teacher educators in our sample were subtly not quite part of. (p. 296)

It is possible that the commitment to research evident in the work of the participants has been influenced by earlier efforts made by universities to encourage former colleges of education TEs to become research active after the introduction of the PBRF and the institutional mergers. If that is the case, a new generation of TEs, recruited to non-research active positions within UBITE may further entrench the research-theory divide. How such practices can continue when the universities, the accrediting body (EDCANZ), the TEs and the profession all see the value in the work of research is an unresolved contradiction. University leaders must address this matter otherwise we are likely to see the continuation of work intensification evident in the work of some TEs: a process associated with negative outcomes including stress,

fatigue, and job dissatisfaction (Macky & Boxall, 2008), and a increased separation of research and practice in ITE.

5. Conclusion

We have argued that university-based ITE offers rich opportunities for research-informed teaching and the generation of new knowledge for education based on strong partnerships between universities and the profession of teachers. However, in order for this to happen, institutions must evaluate current employment practices that favour the generation of research funds over the employment of TEs who are both research active and professionally credentialed. We want Universities to recognise the longer-term benefits of employing and nurturing TEs who can do both. If university-based TEs are supported to engage in scholarship and practice related activities (both elements of the scope of UBITE work), they will be well placed to provide a research-informed teacher preparation resulting in quality teachers for NZs diverse populations.

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