

How Might Teacher Education Live Well in a Changing World? – Introduction

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As part of its required program review and evaluation, the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary sponsored an international conference on teacher education in November of 2006, inviting papers and presentations to address the theme “How Might Teacher Education Live Well In A Changing World?” (Faculty of Education, 2006). The following sets of papers chosen for inclusion in this double of issue of JET, reflect diversely, but with a common interest, responses to the theme question. As a group, the papers provide a rich sense of inquiry into the relation between examples of practice and experience, and deeper ways of conceptualizing and understanding those experiences.

The theme of the conference was intentionally phrased to signal the difficult and complex questions underlying teacher education practice. How we ought to prepare teachers, for what purposes and ends, and in ways that best serve the future of children and their communities is certainly not an idle or only abstract question. Framing the question in terms of responding to a *changing world* also is not intended to simply engage in the commonplace trope of responding to change, but to take seriously the nature of the contexts for which we prepare teachers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the current state of affairs in the world, whether domestic or international (variously referred to as our age of *globalization*), demands of us, as educators, to engage thoughtfully with our work. While the articles presented in these two issues are not *about* globalization, the complexities of globalization nonetheless form a background to the kinds of challenges we face in our communities and university programs. The following papers illustrate this diversely in their concerns with history, cultural and language diversity, understanding traditions, forms of representation and the adequacy of our professional languages, concepts and institutional and pedagogic practices for responding to such challenges. Thus while it is not the purpose of this special issue to discuss globalization per se, it is to

foreground and acknowledge as Perry Anderson (2007) does, that the current political and economic forces can be seen as “conjuncture” of hopeful and not so hopeful possibilities for people on the globe, including possibilities for teaching, schooling, and curriculum.

In his recent book on the issue of contemporary challenges of globalization, Thomas Homer-Dixon (2007) identifies what he terms major “tectonic stresses” that will have an impact on global civilization as we know it, and in a time span shorter than we might like to admit. However, what is critical and interesting in his discussion is that such “tectonic stresses” (environment, trade, the economy, poverty, global warming), and we could add, the kinds of global challenges facing educators (immigration, language and cultural diversity, changing regulatory regimes, and so on), evoke, or certainly ought to, the necessity for different ways of thinking about the world in order to respond to complex issues and situations.

As Hannah Arendt (1961) has suggested in her writing about education, the practice of education, our work as teachers, is always experienced belatedly. We, and our students who desire to become teachers, must be prepared to take on the world as it comes to us, as it exists, however tremulous the circumstances, or within the tremors radiating the kinds of “tectonic stresses” identified by Homer-Dixon. Yet, as Arendt suggests, we must become ready – and our student teachers must become ready – to assume responsibility for renewal of the world.

Arguably, teacher education especially lives in this space between what is, and what might or ought to be. On the one hand, new teachers need to grapple with understanding the realities of schools as they exist (but of course they never exist statically), with rapidly changing communities, technological advances, challenges to the public sphere, growing cultural and other forms of diversity, and so on. On the other hand, we and our students are charged with the responsibility to imagine and narrate alternative possibilities and futures for the young. As Jonathan Lear (2006) suggests in his masterful case study of the Crow First Nation, hope for the future lies not in simply repeating and holding onto ideas and concepts which may once have made sense, but instead hope is found in re-imagining how indeed one might live well in the world, including reconceptualizing our practices and institutions to more ably reflect the situations in which we live.

The two sets of paper which follow take up this challenge to think differently about teacher education, representing multiple voices who care passionately about what it means to “live well” within our practices

of teacher education. The double issue is very loosely organized around two main themes: in the first issue, the papers lean more to questions of understanding teacher education in terms of language and diversity. The second offers perspectives related, again loosely to questions of program and practices. Both sets of papers offer perspectives and thinking related to the overall question posed for the special issue, and the various avenues that may exist for thinking about and practicing well, teacher preparation or education.

The first part begins with Rahat Naqvi and David Jardine's "meditation" on the meaning of "traditional" in contemporary schooling, where, at least in their larger community traditional has come to represent a turn away from more progressive forms of pedagogy. But as they evocatively argue, to use traditional in that sense leaves much unsaid about what truly ought to be held as traditional, echoing Arendt's argument above. Lynn Thomas and Catherine Beauchamp build on this line of questioning in a sense as well, raising the important question of the sources for beginning teachers' identities in a "changing world." In his paper on "grounding teacher education in the human condition," Thomas Falkenberg seeks more deeply to ground questions of possibility and teacher understanding in the "human condition," speaking at once to what is universal in the process of education, but how that also has to be challenged by each person becoming a teacher. Central to Falkenberg's argument is that teaching is impoverished if not learned as an enterprise that is fundamentally moral.

Taking on the question of teacher education at something that can transcend the limits of narrow disciplines, Sean Wiebe and his colleagues suggest the critical role of the arts in learning, and as way to build connections, relations, and understandings that are metaphorically captured through the image of "rhizomes" which suggest that practices and representations live in the world. Focusing as well on the arts in education, Lisa Panayotidis explores how the situating and representations of history carry power and alternative ways of listening, speaking, and seeing in teaching and curriculum. Olenka Bilash and Jooyeon Kang illustrate the complexity of ESL learning, and the importance that relationships between groups of learners and their teachers are essential to understanding the other more fully in terms of their culture and language. In the final paper of this issue, Sheila Spence takes up the stance of "phronesis" or practical wisdom and its relationship and relevance for teacher education, seeing in forms of inquiry the possibilities for thinking about what constitutes the "good"

in practice. Practice, as Spence writes about here, necessarily implies attention to the identity of the teacher, in terms of one who can carry a sense of the good in her practice, and that notion of the good involves an openness to understanding the other and diversity.

In the second volume (to appear in December, 2008), the included articles can be understood to speak more directly to questions of actual teacher education practice and programs. The philosophical position that underlies, even if not explicitly stated, many of the papers in this special edition, begins with Thomas Ryan outlining his theme, by demonstrating through his own experiences and thinking how learning to teach is in itself – or ought to be – a philosophical orientation. Shelby Couvier and her co-writers provide through example how a new teacher, who starts with the kinds of hopes for teaching identified by earlier authors, may continue to grow and “discover” through the appropriate and necessary supportive structures and relations. The article is also a great example of the productive relationships between a new teacher, her university instructor, and a school system administrator.

In linking the idea of “living ethically” and “sustaining inquiry.” Jo Towers illustrates how her research has shown that indeed student and new teachers may embody and enact inquiry in their teaching, but that this requires support and encouragement to find voice and implementation. Towers echoes the enactivists in her thinking, illustrating the challenges of “knowing-how” as well as what, and that the ability to enact good teaching and learning is deeply normative in quality.

The next two papers provide compelling examples of what alternative experiences for learning about teaching, and different contexts for teacher education may indeed orient future teachers to living well in terms of the challenges posed at the outset of this introduction. Colleen Kawalilak discusses the University of Calgary’s “Teaching Across Borders” option and what international experiences offer students to think differently about themselves and their relationships to language, culture, and responsibilities. Gayle Rutherford and her colleagues discuss the experience and results of another “experiment” at the University of Calgary, namely student teachers’ participation in an interprofessional education course. Like the students in Kawalilak’s narrative, those who participated in the interprofessional course also attested to the value of “crossing borders” and the importance of seeing the world through other knowledge and practice perspectives.

Taken as whole, then, the papers presented in these two issues of JET genuinely demonstrate a thoughtful, diverse, and indeed richly conceptual engagement with the question of how teacher education may live well in the world. As well, in Jonathan Lear's terms (2006), they reflect forms of thinking that take up ethically the challenges that face us educators, and in that sense offer hope. We hope, you the reader will accept our invitation to continue the conversation that these papers occasion about our thinking and work in teacher education.

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