

Teacher Education and Drama: Possibilities, Promise, Potential

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Curriculum studies questions and researches issues such as what schools do or should teach and whether or why the aims of education should be to transmit values, shape personal development, or foster academic achievement. Curriculum studies for initial teacher education addresses similar issues, and adds the supplementary task of helping student teachers to critically evaluate the issues as they negotiate the ground spanning the theories and practices of education. Teacher educator and prospective teacher together work to balance and make sense of the experience of content, (sometimes termed “foundational” or “methods”) study undertaken in the tertiary institution, and the professional experience in schools. The prospective teacher negotiates tensions between knowledge of content and of curriculum, pedagogical knowledge and generic teaching skill, knowing as process and knowing in performative terms, as s/he constructs a persona as teacher and educator.

The study of the teacher education curriculum has become firmly established in the field of curriculum studies and theory in the last decade, with an increasing body of research and writing examining the distinctive nature of what it is to prepare teachers to teach. Leading teacher educators who have contributed significantly to the study of teacher education curriculum include Korthagen, Kincheloe and Loughran. Each of the three holds a clear conceptualisation of knowledge and practice, each places the reflection on and synthesis of practice as an essential part of learning to teach, and each considers the teacher's developing sense of identity a central aspect of the teacher education experience. Collectively, their theoretical stances underpin the position to be put forward in this paper. Far from proposing new approaches, this paper takes the stance that initial teacher education already has potential within its existing content and methods, with the guidance of the conceptualisation and theoretical framing of acknowledged experts, to mediate and heighten a prospective teacher's critical understanding and of elements that are essential in a teacher education curriculum.

The context for this paper is my teaching role in a university faculty of education, where I teach drama in education to pre-service teachers who will teach in primary (elementary) schools. The courses I will refer to sit in a three year undergraduate degree (B. Ed(Tchnng)) and in one year graduate diploma in teaching programmes. In this country we have a national curriculum which includes The Arts a one of seven essential learning areas, in turn comprising four disciplines (dance, drama, music and the visual arts). My taught courses are a compulsory component in the teacher education programme, and

though limited in length (five sessions at most), are participatory, experiential, and interactive.

While acknowledging the tensions that exist around curriculum and teacher education, this paper takes a focus on one dimension of the teacher education curriculum that the theorists mentioned all consider important, namely the responsibility for the shaping of teacher identity. It has grown from my recognition that the shared drama experience has value as an opportunity for student teachers and teacher educators to jointly experience, reflect upon, and interrogate concerns which fall within the sphere of curriculum. In the shared embodied experience, they together experience and reflect on learning and teaching, and begin to develop and shape a teacher identity through the enactment of curriculum aspirations. I hold the position that the ways of knowing in drama (transformational, embodied, aesthetic) hold promise for shaping a developing teacher identity, for enhancing the making of connections across the teacher education curriculum, and for understanding more genuinely the potential of drama and the arts in a school curriculum.

Teacher education and curriculum studies:
context and tensions.

The context of compulsory courses described above draws attention to the close association between initial teacher education and a mandated curriculum, the situation that exists in this country. While the obligation to cover all curriculum areas ensures pre-service “exposure” to the subjects that teachers will be required to teach, it is

nevertheless the role of studies of curriculum to investigate the curriculum's rationale.

Clark (2005), writing of the New Zealand context, challenges an uncritical acceptance of the received structure and content of a national curriculum which partitions knowledge and, he says, avoids addressing how a curriculum might be structured. His point for teacher education is that prospective teachers should be scrutinising the ways curricula are organised, and should interrogate critically a view of the world in divided categories, a thinking capacity that will emerge in application later in this account.

Contemporary discussions about curricula however, whether for schools or for higher education, come with calls for change to cope with uncertainty, unpredictability, and the challenges of the 21st century (Cobo, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2006; McWilliam, 2010; Noddings, 2013; Wagner, 2008.) Economic crises, globalisation, social change, the impact of technologies all have an impact on the way schooling happens around the world, and though international practice agrees that the quality of teaching is critical and that change is necessary, policies and provisions for recruitment, preparation and ongoing professional development vary (Darling-Hammond & Liebermann, 2012). In teacher education deliberations over the status of the profession and standards for teacher quality, and discussions about alternative pathways into teaching and the increased school-based component of teacher preparation persist (Cameron & Baker, 2004; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2006.) In considerations of curriculum and the knowledge base for teaching, the established notions of curriculum as structure for providing access to knowledge (Young,

2014), or as a set of teaching and learning prescriptions (Scott, 2014) continue to be argued. Teacher education should be the place where questions of what knowledge makes up a curriculum and how is it formed should be interrogated and debated, yet even there decisions about knowledge and curriculum are contested (Barnett, 2015) between profession, academic institution, and state (Clark, 2005.)

Writing from a New Zealand context and taking a broad view of the field, the question of what teacher education should look like into the twenty first century is considered in a think-piece by Gilbert (2102). The twentieth century pattern of teachers collecting a personalised body of knowledge of content, pedagogy, systems, and practices needs to change, and Gilbert presses for a new orientation towards knowledge. Knowledge is no longer an object but is “something that does something” (p. 109), created in the spaces between experts, and belonging in its changing state to webs of people who can expand ideas further. Teachers for the twenty first century, she says, need skills for collaboration, negotiation, for dealing with disagreements. Though this sounds like new terminology for communication and sharing ideas, Gilbert pushes the idea further, maintaining that the teacher for this century will need a wider range of skills and roles. Teachers, she says, will need both a deep knowledge of an established discipline of knowledge and a competence for innovation and collaboration in the making of connections to produce new knowledge.

Noddings (2013) puts forward principles of flexibility, communication, and a responsibility for questioning and challenge and innovation as values to be brought to the fore to drive the

curriculum, and Kane (2009) too is convinced that teacher education should be engaged in questioning the beliefs, values and practices behind a curriculum in order to make a difference in a world of change. She writes that being absorbed into the sphere of universities has increased pressure on teacher education for research and changed modes of working, but that its status in the academy remains low. It may be a part of a tertiary education that looks straightforward, but is in fact in Kane's words "messy, unpredictable, loaded with inconsistencies, and enormously complex" (p. 41). Kane imagines a teacher education landscape with a commitment to social justice and freedom, and to learning through critical reflection of the experiences of self and others. With education more and more prescribed, she calls for questioning what is taken for granted, asks both student teachers and teacher educators to examine their practices and their impact on learning about teaching, and puts the student teacher's developing knowledge of self as a central focus for teacher education.

Attention to this responsibility is addressed by several current theorists. Sutherland, Howard and Markausite (2010) take a broad view and, drawing on a 2004 synthesis by Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, set out characteristics and factors impacting on the growth of professional identity in the pre-service period. On a more specific theme, Sumara, Davis and Iftody (as cited in Phelan, 2015) assert that the circumscribing of teacher education has had a normalising effect, and that predictable stable and normative identities have been produced. Phelan (2015) herself argues that teacher education may risk a cyclical repetition of what currently exists, and stresses the

importance of recognising and working with a teacher's "singularity" as a human being and the shaping of teacher subjectivity.

Consideration of the singularity of the teacher's sense of self returns to the three theorists mentioned at the outset of the discussion, and the guidance they offer for conceptualising teacher education. Korthagen (2001) set out that students' experiences and responses to those experiences should be starting point for those learning to teach rather than objective theories, and that understanding themselves as teachers rather than teachers who know about teaching would help them interpret classroom practice. Kincheloe (2004) wanted teachers to understand the complexities of practice with a commitment to socially just and democratic vision of schooling. Loughran (2006; 2010; 2015) emphasises the interdependence between learning about teaching and teaching about teaching, and establishing of the practice of self study as a path to expertise.

Together, the writings and theorists discussed indicate shifting tides in teacher education. They provide theoretical background to frame the direction that this discussion now takes, for the principles held by the three last theorists are connection points to drama – the emphasis on experience, on self and other understanding, and a commitment to human interest. The paper now proceeds to look at how drama as a curriculum subject, pedagogy, and teaching approach can foster thinking imagining and feeling in experiential encounters that will build confident, creative, capable, resilient, and reflective teachers. A story from a teacher education course will be used as a glimpse of what practice looks like now and of the

affordances and promises that it offers to deepen and enrich the experience of those who want to teach. The story is preceded by a brief account of drama education, its values and pedagogical approach.

Teacher education and the context of drama

The three theorists mentioned at the end of the previous section promote ideals which align closely with those of drama education. Drama education's pedagogy is as O'Toole (2002) describes, a productive pedagogy, as potentially productive in the teacher education setting as in the classroom. It shares the way of learning and teaching practised in the arts, where culture counts and motivation is intrinsic, where learning is active, integrated, and holistic, and built on collaborative and social principles. (Anderson, 2014). Drama's developmental and socially responsible values support its transformative potential, while its expressive and holistic features represent an aesthetic value. In classroom practice, drama's emphasis has always been adaptable.

Drama's pedagogy has been influenced by strong theorists and practitioners - Heathcote, Neelands, O'Neill, O'Toole and many more who were impelled by social issues and a desire to help children and teachers envision and work towards a better world, through methods which were artistically driven and achievable in an ordinary classroom. It is a valuable and obvious means of enhancing literacy learning with a wealth of evidence (Miller & Saxton, 2004; Ewing & Simons, 2006.) It can be used as a medium for learning in many

subject areas, and remains an effective and worthwhile means of personal development (O'Toole, Stinson, & Moore, 2012.) Drama works with processes to develop the skills and understandings highly valued for 21st century learning (Hatton & Lovesy, 2015) - risk taking, openness to ideas, flexibility, collaboration and perhaps most importantly, empathy. Key words in drama section of the Arts statement in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 20) include *human experience; purposeful play; link imagination, thoughts and feeling; communicate; collaborative...* all words that are part of the discourse inherited through drama traditions. Its value is often simply in encouraging the seeing and understanding of another perspective. As O'Connor (2008), says

we must recognise the absolute centrality of drama in giving a sense of what it is to be other than ourselves in a world where otherness and difference is often something to be feared and punished. (p. 29)

Effective teaching in drama (Anderson, 2014) demonstrates four consistent features – it is mediated by active engagement, aware of current pedagogy, displays an appreciation of the aesthetic and artistic, and it values meaning-making as an outcome of the drama learning process. Active engagement, participation and experience suggest *embodied* knowing. Meaning making, thinking and reflecting will bring about *transformative* understandings. The core of the artform nurtures the *aesthetic* sense. The pedagogy, the teaching-learning context will be *situated*. Each of these strands of knowing then can be identified and talked about in a drama experience. A well taught experiential course employing these approaches can help

teachers to tolerate uncertainty, teach creatively, be open and flexible to experience, willing to take risks, and able to think and work collaboratively. A productive pedagogy indeed, which may surely be invaluable in preparing teachers for uncertain, changing times, and towards a developing sense of their teacher identity.

Lived experience – a story from a teacher education classroom

The incident comes from a drama education course I teach for first year student teachers who are preparing to be generalist teachers in the primary/elementary school sector. The course is short (four sessions only) and in the first, I often use a short story by a well-known New Zealand writer, Patricia Grace. It is a story of first encounters, and it is often the first encounter for the class with drama. A child goes to school for the first time and her story is misunderstood by the teacher. She retells the incident to her grandparents at home, and the writing brings forth a poignant realisation of the gaps between lives. Using drama strategies, we look at and listen to the characters, imagine their thinking and feeling, and explore the interplay of teacher, student, culture, teacher knowledge, hidden curriculum, cross cultural understanding. We use strategies of role taking, speaking thoughts, questioning a role, creating a reflective image. What happens in the drama space is an embodied experience- we are all moving, thinking, talking, questioning, reflecting. In microcosm it is a slice of a lived curriculum: in a time-bound experience, the teachers and students re-create, enact and reflect on the perspectives of the characters and their lives. Together

we ask why, and then ask questions more closely about our own assumptions and responses to the story of one family's encounter with school. In our class setting the conversation touches on interpretations, ambiguities, perspectives, recreating the voices in the story with genuine care. When student teachers experiment with and see others taking on the roles of other characters, they are witness to their own and others' identities. In making an imagined identification with a character different from themselves they get closer to an empathy and an understanding of the other. The student teachers, coming to the story with an idealistic enthusiasm, frequently condemn the fictional teacher, perhaps uneasily recognising her unquestioning correctness in themselves. Seeing a class mate represent the six-year-old's bemused but unaffected confusion with swinging legs and miserably lowered head stirs compassion, but can too prompt discussion about how drama can evoke an embodied response. There are deeper questions to be asked. Confronting the loyal steadfast grandfather figure and pondering his possible attitude to approaching the school raises a more disrupting speculation about how schools and teachers are perceived by others.

On one level this may look like a pedagogical content knowledge exercise for student teachers, and in the unpacking of teacher actions alongside their reflections on their own responses there is much to be learned about drama's pedagogy. But the experience can be theorised as an event which presents a critical dimension of a part of the teacher education curriculum. The prospective teachers are put in a space where they can ponder and speculate with others, and be witnessed by others, in the act of making meaning of an event.

Applying Pinar's (2012) concept of curriculum as "complicated conversation," (p. 193), it is the opportunity for a negotiation of understanding between teacher educator and student teacher through an event bridging theory and practice, and in presenting challenging concepts it allows for co-construction of ideas. The engagement in the experience gives the opportunity for student teachers to see the role of perceptions, senses and emotions in learning.

The same sort of learnings about teaching and education are undoubtedly facilitated in teacher education settings by using other strategies, and similarly the strategies of drama could be used in other subject settings. "Role plays" are common and useful, but the way of knowing that drama has the potential to unlock is of a slightly different order. The situation described prompted reflection which was likely to have been more deeply felt through the bodily experience. The slow and layered imagined engagement with the characters and the setting was likely to have prompted more thorough engagement with perspectives. Drama elicits a knowing that is embodied, transformational and aesthetic.

The story as intersection of theory

The story illustrates an intersection of theories of curriculum, of the arts, and of drama education.

Pinar (2012) describes the educational point of the curriculum as understanding the relations among academic knowledge, the state of society, process of self-formation, and the character of the historical moment

in which we live, in which others have lived, and in
which our descendants will someday live. (p. 190)

Aoki's theorising on curriculum is relevant too, and Pinar (Pinar & Irwin, 2005), in the introduction to a collection of that Aoki's work, writes of how the curriculum is brought about as teacher and students reflectively shape the reality of the classroom in "situational praxis" (Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 5). There could be many events similar to the one described where student teachers could witness teacher educators' willing and open efforts to bring active attention to balancing and probing the curricular practices for both prospective teachers and their future students. The described experience through Pinar's theoretical lens is an example of a lived experience with teacher and student teachers as co-actors in interpretive acts, with, as Pinar noted in the Aoki introduction, the "critical turn" with possibilities for reconstructing the ideas with an emancipatory interest. It became as Pinar (2012) himself writes of curriculum, a "complicated conversation" (p. 193), in which participants engaged in an informed exchange to construct between them a shared meaning from the experiences, subjectivities, traditions and knowledge emerging from the education encounter. The drama experience provided the conditions, social, emotional, imaginative, from which the conversation could grow. The conversation has the chance of a different complication each time it occurs, for different participants bring different possibilities.

The story and the way in which it was used in the teacher education setting made connections to concepts of identity and subjectivity, and though the terms often occur alongside each other,

they are distinct. In the teacher education process, student teachers are encouraged (Akkermann & Meijer, 2010) to see their identity as multiple, dynamic, fluid, an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation worked through and socially constructed. They are encouraged to shape the unique and noteworthy features of that individual identity for its career possibilities. The lens of theories of subjectivity however gives another angle on the benefits for the student teachers of working through drama with the story of beginnings. In Arendt's sense, as Phelan (2015) explains, subjectivity is about a beginning and a coming into being – the developmental task of the student teacher. Phelan (2015) holds that teacher education should be concerned with the teacher's subjectivity, and his or her freedom of expression and thought. Davis and Sumara's (2006) use a term "unskinning" (p. 76), and refer to a hermeneutic understanding of curriculum achieved through investigating beliefs and assumptions from literary starting points. In drama terms, this would be described as a pretext, a starting point having the ability to arouse curiosity and the potential then to launch further examination. Davis and Sumara (2006) discuss how the sense of self and identity emerges from interaction, and from overlapping experiences and phenomena, a fitting description of the drama event. It is my contention that such an experience of overlapping is where curricular spaces for teacher education and the arts converge, for the arts offer the space, physical, emotional, imaginative to experience the curriculum as lived and to connect with self.

The experience may be theorised through an arts and a drama lens. Eisner (2005) wrote of the principles which infuse knowing in

the arts– the openness of thinking, flexibility of purpose, the resilience to experiment and then decide to try again. He wrote of the way that in the arts, meaning and sense emerge rather than being pre-scripted, and of judgements and decisions are made without rules, relying on sense and nuance. Such principles prepare teachers well to create, imagine and innovate to meet future challenges, and ready them for accommodating the contingent, provisional and indeterminate nature of knowledge as it is thought of in the twenty first century.

The views of drama theorists add another theoretical dimension, for a number of researchers have studied the identity and subjectivity of the drama teacher and have considered the ways their experiences shape evolving teaching personae. Their findings can inform us as teacher educators about how prospective teachers' experiences in drama can inform and support their understanding of drama, of the act of teaching, and of self.

Working in the area of teacher narrative, identity and subjectivity Wales (2009) realised that because drama works through emotion and feeling and thinking, it is a powerful site for constructing identity. Teachers in their generic education courses will be introduced to contemporary notions of identity as multiple and shifting, and of the emotional and feeling component of subjectivity, and it is of special relevance to becoming a drama teacher. Wales stresses the importance of teachers having an ethical obligation to know themselves in order to be clear about the values they select for their teaching. O'Toole (1998) also holds that drama teachers be attuned to their own subjectivity, warning that the moral idealism drama

teachers often bring to their work may prove both inspiration and entanglement. Challenging assumptions and certainties might be a noble venture, but here is an associated responsibility for being clear sighted about moral positioning. O'Toole's thinking reinforces the importance this paper has attached to student teachers' being given the chance to challenge their own and others' thinking to come to a better understanding of self and others. Drama education as a part of teacher education can be a place to start such a process, a view taken by Whatman (2000) who, in her New Zealand study, put the argument that the education of students in initial teacher education could be based on role both dramatically and phenomenologically. She herself used role as a means to prompt student discussion on the role of the teacher, something which would be taking place in generalist courses, but she also addressed role-taking as a deliberate act. Whatman was interested in seeing how students managed and integrated their roles as performers, teachers and students when exposed to drama education experiences of role-taking, use of symbol and metaphor, and teaching as performance. She extended her findings to conclude that time spent learning performance skills through the approaches of drama education would benefit prospective teachers in understanding of both self and performance for teaching. The work of these researchers endorses the importance of drama education as a component of teacher education. Drama in the pre-service setting has value for the building of teacher role and teacher identity, for the understanding of the relational dimension of education, and as a site for shared and rigorous reflection to make meaning of teaching.

In the light of the shifts that impact on education in the twenty-first century, it is accepted that teacher education must challenge old approaches. This paper does not look to an entirely new curriculum for teacher education, but rather has sought a theoretical space within which to consider the ways that disciplines of knowledge might come together differently to inform and contribute to its direction. There will always be essential elements to the curriculum and there will always be alternative ways of delivering it. It remains our responsibility to constantly interrogate the field, to enquire into ways that new understandings can be created between educators and prospective teachers. Arts educators do look in different directions, and Doll's (1993, 2013) curriculum that is "generated not predefined, indeterminate yet bounded, "(Doll, 2013, p. 216) seems to offer that space.

He proposes a curriculum based on four "R" principles: richness, recursion, relations and rigour, principles which connect with the ways of working in the arts. Richness implies depth and layers of meaning, the multiple interpretations that through dialogue can bring about transformation. Recursion might imply iteration but Doll (2013) calls it "thoughts looping back on themselves " (p. 217), and links it to the way that through reflective interaction with others, a sense of self develops. Both principles have been reflected in the drama work described. In the act of recognising and reflecting on cultural context student teachers had the chance as Doll says, to "construct the conversation about the act of teaching" (p. 219), the relational dimension of Doll's interpretation of rigor in a curriculum sense takes account of the unfixed and open nature of knowing, so

carries an obligation to seek out and examine other assumptions and patterns, which in the context of the drama incident would be an intended consequence of collaborative reflection.

Doll's principles, the lived experience, the complex conversation are all curricular frames within which the experiential act of teaching and learning in drama would fit. The drama, therefore, was a space for the merging of several curricular landscapes. On their individual paths towards professional identity as a teacher, the drama prompted reflection through experienced emotion, feeling, action, closer to a holistic notion of reflection (Zeichner & Liston, 2004). The aspects of teacher identity development noted by Sutherland, Howard and Markausite (2010) correspond well with the ways of knowing that a teacher acquires through drama (Anderson, 2014). Drama's embodied knowing entails active engagement of the individual in the process of interpretation and reinterpretation, and identity is shaped within a place and a context. Drama's transformational knowing lets participants see that they can understand and have agency in making things different. Reflection may be challenging for student teachers, in part because of the theory-practice gap formal courses and practical classrooms. Though I cannot know whether those drama experiences do directly impact the student teachers' sense of identity, I am convinced that the incorporation of drama methods does give the opportunity to collaborate and challenge and speculate on alternative interpretations. The process of learning in the arts is not driven by a pre-planned outcome. It will include invention, discovery, play, and most importantly in the teacher education experience, talk and critical dialogue that is open, respectful,

significant and purposeful. For both prospective teachers and in time their students, and for prospective teachers and teacher educators, involvement in the ways of knowing and learning in the arts will have the same benefits. The chance to share experiences and recognise others', to listen and feel empathy, and to imagine the lives of others is a conceptualisation of living a curriculum that recognises and uses the promise and potential of embodied and transformational conversations in the spaces between student teacher and teacher educator.

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