Uncovering the knowledge construction of teacher educators

What we learn from and with teachers

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Teachers are assumed to learn from teacher educators. However, the existence of a reciprocal learning relationship where teacher educators learn from teachers has received little attention in the literature. This article reports the findings from an Australian Research Committee-funded research project investigating teacher educators' construction of knowledge for teacher education that focuses on what teacher educators learn from and with teachers and the interactions and relationships between teachers and teacher educators which facilitate this construction of knowledge.

Teacher educators are found to construct their knowledge from and with teachers' personal practical knowledge and an understanding of their professional knowledge contexts. Opportunities for the exchange of such knowledge are discussed and the nature of a 'borderland' between schools and universities explored. These findings are presented within the context of a developing understanding of the work of teacher educators, the nature of the teacher educators' knowledge and the role of knowledge of professional practice and context in its construction.

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge of teacher educators, their work as teachers or even as 'teacher-researchers' has been largely ignored within the literature (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996). A few studies are now emerging which document aspects of the life and work of teacher educators. For example, Acker (1997) describes becoming a teacher educator in Canada. The experiences of women teacher educators in Australia during restructuring (Cooper, Ryan, Perry & Gay, 1998) and life histories of academics in colleges of advance education (Frawley, 1996) are also reported. Gardner and Cunningham (1998) have documented the relationships between teacher trainers and educational change in Great Britain.

These studies do not, however, focus on the question of the knowledge construction of teacher educators. This lack of research may in part follow from the marginalised posi-
tion of education faculties. It would appear that neither the academy nor the teaching profession values the knowledge of teacher educators. In the context of managing the dilemmas posed in collaboration between school and universities, Cuban (1992) identifies three competing cultural values:

The university culture, prizing the values of reflection, rigorous analysis and scientifically produced research, competes against values within a professional school of applying disciplinary knowledge to practical situations. Both sets of values embedded in university structures compete against another set of values within schools. There action is prized. The knowledge that is admired is concrete relevant, drawn from experience, and applied to the practical dilemmas of teaching and learning (Clifford and Guthrie, 1988; Goodlad, 1990). (p.8)

Reynolds (1995) argues that there is a deep feeling against education faculty in the university. It is suggested that commonly expressed beliefs such as ‘teachers are born, not made’ have contributed to the view that teaching cannot be taught through formal instruction, so that “the logical consequence of these arguments is that professional education neither needs nor deserves university status” (p.4).

These opinions suggest that other members of the university do not recognize a ‘discipline’ of teacher education and, therefore, no discernable theoretical knowledge base for the work of teacher educators within the academy.

Teacher educators are, on the other hand, viewed by the teaching profession as being too theoretical; for example, Dill and Stafford (1994), referred to in Roth (1994), assert that:

the structures, organizations and reward systems required to sustain universities, their faculties, and their students preclude any restructuring of schools of education in ways that would enable them to prepare excellent teachers. (p.620)

Dinham and Scott (1996) note that “few teacher education programs concentrate on the daily, practical expectations of teaching” even though they acknowledge that a “theoretical base is essential” (p.47).

Yeatman (1996b) distinguishes between the work of academics and academic knowledge, which is “ruled by the conventions of science taken in its most general sense” (p.287), and that of teachers, which is “informed by a particular knowledge base ... and which (is) also oriented in terms of a service ethic” (p.287). Cuban (1992) concludes that “despite decades of trying to reconcile these competing values and conditions one obvious outcome has been a stunted sense of community among educational researchers and practitioners” (p.8). It might be argued that there is also a stunted sense of community between teacher educators and teachers.

The ongoing work of professional development schools in the United States (Bullough, Kauchak, Crow, Hobbs & Stokes, 1997b; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Metcalf-Turner & Fischetti, 1996; Murray, Hollingsworth & Garcia, 1998; Ross, 1995) and similar initiatives in Australia (Gore, 1995) focus on developing partnerships. These are expected to provide “exemplary education for pre-service teachers, support continuing professional development of experienced teachers, and involve schools and universities
in collaborative research” (Gore, 1995, p.86) and thus overcome the divide created by the competing values of these communities.

However, research into such partnerships does not necessarily address such intended outcomes. Myers (1997) describes how university-school collaborative efforts in the United States and Canada, and action research efforts in the United Kingdom, focus more on the mechanics of establishing the partnerships and interpersonal relationships. They appear less concerned with the research literature on school reform or reform-oriented scholarly writing on learning, the knowledge base for teaching, adult learning, reflective practice and teacher development in such partnerships.

Given this agenda it could be argued that professional development schools perpetuate the emphasis on ‘practical knowledge’ within schools whilst the university’s role is still to conduct (and control) the research agenda, albeit collaboratively. This privileging of academic research over teachers’ practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1983; Yeatman, 1996b) is evident in various current themes in the literature. For example, the importance of developing teachers as researchers (Gore & Zeichner, 1995; Tripp, 1987), improving the relevance of educational research (Hargreaves, 1997; Kennedy, 1997) and finding ways of enabling teachers to have a voice in developing the knowledge base about teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Zeichner, 1994) are predicated on the value of practitioner research being recognised by the academic community rather than seeking recognition from other practitioners. Yeatman (1996b) argues in a similar vein that even though “action research looks like practice friendly research (it) continues to privilege science as the proper mode of knowing” (p.285).

There have been a number of initiatives in Australia and elsewhere which have gone some way to develop a sense of community between academics as educational researchers and teacher educators and teachers as researchers and as practitioners. These have focused on partnerships between universities and schools in support of school reform and teacher development. For example, the Innovative Links Project (ACIIC Roundtable, 1996; Yeatman, 1996a; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995) and National Schools Network (Ladwig, Currie & Chadbourne, 1994; Sachs, 1997) have provided support for collaboration between teachers and academics in addressing school-based issues and concerns and given opportunities for the development of both teachers and academics (Grundy et al., in preparation; Hogan & Strickland, 1998; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995). These initiatives have also provided:

opportunities for both parties to rethink how they can improve their practice. When teacher research is complemented by academic research new types of knowledge can be produced and new forms of teacher and teacher educator practice and professionalism can be initiated. (Sachs, 1997, p.54)

This suggests that there can be more emphasis on the complementary nature of the research and learning that occurs within the exchanges between teachers and academics; rather than the view that teachers and academics are seen as belonging to distinct cultures where there is more commonality within each group than between them. In such a
case it might be assumed that teacher educators are a homogenous group who share the outsider’s interpretation of their priorities - as having little interest in the ‘practical’, just as it is often assumed that teachers have little interest in research and the theoretical. However, as Bullough, Hobbs, Kauchak, Crow and Stokes (1997a) note:

Our data suggests another cultural terrain ... Across the discipline driven researchers, the field-focused researchers, and the clinical faculty, recognition is growing that over time a clinical ghetto has formed within the department, grounded in values quite different in some respects from those of tenure-line faculty. (p.91)

Bullough et al (1997a) also describe how each of these groups has its own priorities; for example,

clinical faculty see their primary commitment to their preservice students, as well as to the teachers and students in public schools. Discipline driven researchers view teacher education as one of several important missions of the department ... and field-focussed researchers are torn between doing substantive research connected to schools and the demands of a research university which values theoretical journals over teacher education journals. (p.92)

How then do teacher educators working in partnership with teachers manage such differences in ‘cultural terrain’? The field-focused researchers described by Bullough et al (1997) and teacher educators involved in partnerships between schools and universities have been characterised as living somewhere in the borderlands, at the margins, as boundary spanners or as translators between theory and practice. For example, Leiberman (1992) describes living a “double life” (p.5), seeing herself move from being just a teacher to being “just a translator ... Calling us ‘boundary spanners’, ‘linkers’, ‘marginal’ – depending on one’s orientation – helped, but just a little” (p.6). Sandholtz and Finan (1998) note that:

The emergence of school-university partnerships has created a borderland where those who work in both settings may find themselves swimming in a new element. (p.13)

But what is the cultural terrain of the borderland? What is the knowledge of this borderland? How is that knowledge acquired? Whose knowledge counts as legitimate? How are the competing claims of the university on teacher educators to conform to the expectations of university academics reconciled with the needs of teachers both in service and preservice? It is questions such as these that we hoped to address as a result of this collaborative and self-reflective enquiry into the knowledge construction of teacher educators through their work with and alongside teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The research was guided by the central research question: how do teacher educators construct knowledge for teacher education? This was addressed through the exploration of a number of sub-questions. What and how do university-based teacher educators learn from teachers? How do teacher educators critically assess this learning? How do teacher
educators incorporate this learning into their professional practice? How do teachers perceive their role in this process? What are the perceived professional benefits of this learning relationship?

The research was designed as a self-reflective study using a process of reflective self-deliberation (Bonser & Grundy, 1988). This was carried out in two phases. The first phase was a data generation phase. This involved a group of teachers and teacher educators meeting for an initial discussion of issues relating to the research. During this discussion areas for reflection were identified and a set of interview questions generated.

The interview was in three parts. The first part asked us to think and talk in general terms about the learning relationship between teachers and teacher educators. The second part asked us to describe and reflect upon specific interactions we had had either as a teacher educator with teachers or as a teacher with teacher educators. The questions in this section of the interview also asked us to reflect upon these interactions or relationships as learning experiences for teacher educators. The third part again was speculative, asking us to reflect more generally upon the potential for learning by teacher educators from teachers.

The interview questions were revised and further developed before a research assistant tape-recorded an individual, self-reflective, open-ended interview with each member of the research team. These were transcribed and research participants edited and revised the transcripts of their interviews to produce a statement of documented experiences and reflections in written rather than spoken form. These transcripts were the data which the research team and a research facilitator worked with during a three-day collaborative workshop, a three-day data analysis workshop and four subsequent writing days.

Our processes within the first workshop in April 1997 focused first on establishing a shared set of expectations and understandings of the work we were doing. We identified our reasons for being there, who we were and what we understood by what it is to learn as an adult. We achieved this through individual writing, round robins, walking, talking and listening, and the use of visual metaphors to explore our understandings. During the first afternoon and subsequent sessions we explored the texts derived from the interviews through individual and paired analysis before pooling our insights to provide a group perspective.

We focused on two texts first: one from a teacher educator and the other from a school-based practitioner. Our task was to identify what we expected to find, what we didn’t expect to find, and what we did not find which we expected to find. We then worked on identifying key phrases, categorising them and then mapping them for the first two transcripts before working in pairs on two of the remaining texts.

We subsequently completed a three day writing workshop in October 1997 where we undertook a more detailed analysis of the transcripts, coding and entering on NUD*IST (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1993). Not all members of the original research team continued their involvement to this stage of the project.² Initial processes within the group involved re-establishing our contacts with each other and re-orienting
to the data. This has been a feature of each of our workshops and writing days. When we met again in October 1997 we each reread our personal interview data and some of us had the opportunity to look at other transcripts that we had not read before. We worked as two groups, coming together as a large group at several points during the three days to share the outcomes of our analysis. One group worked on the question of how teacher educators learnt from teachers. The second group focused on what was learnt with and from teachers, and it is these findings which are reported here.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHER EDUCATORS

What is the 'knowledge' of the teacher educator? Beattie (1997) in describing the creation of communities of inquiry suggests that:

*teachers* themselves should know what they know, and that they should use that knowledge to make new knowledge, and to continually reconstruct their professional understandings. (p.125)

We would like to argue that teacher educators are also teachers who should know what they know, and that they should use that knowledge to make new knowledge, and continually reconstruct their professional understandings. The following discussion explores the nature of the knowledge of teacher educators. The teacher educators together identify the development of a broad base of knowledge as significant, including both theoretical and practical elements:

I think teacher educators need to have a very broad knowledge base and I suppose traditionally that's been thought of as a base in both theory and practice. That way of thinking is still quite useful but I'd see those things as being much more related. (TE Carolyn, 9-12)³

This knowledge is well articulated by one teacher educator as discipline-related knowledge and knowledge of practices:

There is knowledge about subject disciplines, knowledge about human learning, knowledge about human society, knowledge about the contextual issues such as the political purposes of schooling in society: All of that is substantive disciplinary related knowledge. Then of course, there is knowledge about the practices of teaching and the practices of schools. But these kinds of knowledge need to be intellectually held and generated. They shouldn't be seen as separate. (TE Carolyn, 12-21)

There are other 'knowings' which are more about the knowledge of the teacher educator as practitioner:

There are other 'knowings' which enable the interaction between myself and students to be more effective; my capacity to communicate effectively, my capacity and my knowledge of ways of creating an appropriate learning environment for my students, my knowledge of how I can work to meet individual student needs and identify the differences between my students. (TE Karen, 19-24)
Cultural understanding is also seen as being part of this knowledge of practice:

I think that you do need to have a realistic, on the ground, understanding of the culture of the classroom, and what’s involved in the reality of day to day teaching, which encompasses many more things than just teaching maths or teaching language or teaching social studies. (TE Nicola, 18-22)

Working in a number of schools and with a variety of teachers provides teacher educators with opportunities to learn about a range of contexts and practices; for example,

The teacher educator can have access to a wider variety of contexts and practices than his or her own particular personal experience of teaching could provide. (TE Nicola, 100-103)

However, a distinction is made between the knowledge of educational theories and teaching practices (including knowledge of the classroom context) and a knowledge of the teachers’ wider professional context. This contextual knowledge is seen as an essential part of the teacher educator’s knowledge, located in the ‘real’ world where theory and practice articulate:

So a teacher educator does, I think, need to have a really good knowledge of the context in which the theory and the teaching practice etc., that are being passed on to the student teachers, must occur. That it’s not a laboratory context; it is a real world context. (TE Nicola, 23-26)

This also involves an understanding of the impact of ‘big picture’ issues on schools and the work of teachers, which was a key area identified by the teachers:

When teacher educators communicate with school-based practitioners they are able to discuss issues that may face teacher education students and find out about the changes that are taking place in the system. (T Veronica, 45-48)

I know what we’re doing and we’re subject to constant change I’m just wondering whether the universities are keeping up with these changes: organizational changes, curriculum changes, changes in pupils’ expectation, the demands on pupils and pupils’ changing needs. (T Eric, 140-144)

Teacher educators also list a number of areas of change and indicate the importance of learning about the impact of these changes on schools directly from teachers:

So school-based practitioners are best placed to give teacher educators practical access to that evolving set of professional responsibilities. (TE Sally, 210-212)

Particular reference is made by both teacher educators and teachers to the impact of the implementation of systemic policy initiatives:

Teacher educators need to be current with issues affecting the education system – be it performance management, the current industrial climate or any other issues, which have an impact on the role of the school-based practitioner. (T Veronica, 19-22)
When I talk to practitioners in schools and when they talk to me about their work and how some of these policies are impacting on them or what the policies are meaning to them, I learn a lot more from them than I would by just reading the policy or the literature or reading other research. (TE Carolyn, 150-154)

Such knowledge of ‘bigger picture’ issues is important both to inform the teacher educator’s work with the perspective and understanding of teachers, but also to feed into the teacher educator’s research agenda. As one teacher educator comments, it provides the opportunity

... to experience some of the things that I am learning about: how schools are responding to some of the sorts of micro economic reform initiatives, essentially some of the restructuring agenda, how devolution is working on the ground in schools, how policies are being implemented in schools, how schools are adapting, how people are responding to some of the pressures that are coming from the socio-economic political context within which they are working. There’s only one place that I can learn that and that’s really from practitioners. (TE Carolyn, 131-142)

Thus the knowledge of teacher educators identify here relates to knowledge of theory, knowledge of their own and teachers’ practices and contextual knowledge. Contextual knowledge, which seems to be the ‘place’ where theory and practice come together, is learnt through teacher educators having access to the ‘experience’ of being a practitioner. It comes vicariously from making an opportunity to learn with and from teachers and from the teacher educator’s own experiences as a practitioner. It also comes from the teacher educator’s engagement in educational research. Having access to theoretical and practical knowledge, and to these experiences of different contexts, may enable the teacher educator to be a ‘boundary spanner’ translating the experience of working in schools and with teachers to other audiences such as student teachers, their colleagues and the research community.

CONSTRUCTING NEW KNOWLEDGE IN AND THROUGH INTERACTION AND RELATIONSHIP

The interviews of teacher educators and teachers also show that the richness of the knowledge described is developed through the interactions and relationships between teacher educators and teachers. Teacher educators and teachers show a high degree of congruence in their perceptions of teacher educators’ construction of knowledge in and through their interaction and relationship with teachers.

The knowledge is often described as being about the ‘real’ work of the teacher in the classroom, with its focus on the practical. Learning about the ‘realities’ of implementation of new initiatives is used to both inform their own teaching practices and to help student teachers develop their expertise. For example,

We had very experienced teachers in the unit who had used student centered approaches over a number of years and challenged some of the assumptions that we made in terms of process, we learnt and we did it differently. (TE Karen, 459-462)
Collecting specific ideas of planning, programming and practical applications and collecting ideas of methods used. (TEric, 55-57)

I can go out to schools and see teachers doing very innovative things that we haven’t thought of that means that I can bring those ideas (to) working with the students. (TE Vivienne, 162-165)

Both teacher educators and teachers recognise that their interactions and relationship are also important to fostering research as a means of knowledge construction; for example,

Just expanding on their knowledge base may be opening up a whole lot of areas that they may want to do research into. (T Mary, 412-413)

I’m feeding that knowledge into my research. (TE Carolyn, 76)

This renewal of experience is valuable for the opportunity for “practice to inform theory” (TE Emily, 38), to explore “whether the theories we’ve been using need to be revised or rethought” (TE Emily, 44) and “affects student-teacher learning through modified programme/unit design and content” (TE Sally, 77-79). The knowledge construction that teacher educators do through their interaction and relationships with teachers is ably described by one teacher educator as seeing “through the eyes of the school-based educator” (TE Sally, 78).

Another subtler theme emerges from our examination of the construction of knowledge through interactions between teacher educators and teachers. It has to do with a sense of connection with the profession that is achieved through collaboration on such projects as Innovative Links and this collaborative research project. This connection provides opportunities for a sense of enhanced professionalism to develop where there is an identification of teacher educators with teachers and some acceptance on the part of teachers that teacher educators are part of the profession of teaching:

Also, of my own sense of connection with the profession. Through the Innovative Links Project ... I really did feel a sense of connection and partnership with the profession. That was really about my own professional standing within the profession. (TE Carolyn, 300-306)

The interrelationships between teachers and teacher educators are central to the development of this sense of enhanced professionalism. A teacher also notes the importance of such professional connections:

Well the professional benefit for the profession in general is, that if we do communicate, share ideas, and are available to one another then we must enhance the profession. (TEric, 292-294)

Collaboration and a respect for the mutuality of exchange between teachers and teacher educators are central to this sense of enhanced professionalism. However, our relationships in this collaborative research project with each other had already been
established in other contexts and the importance of such prior associations to the success of our collaboration here needs further exploration.

In conclusion, whilst there is much agreement among teacher educators and teachers about the breadth of knowledge they should have, and how they construct and reconstruct this knowledge in the light of working with and alongside teachers, there are differences in perspective. The existence of such mutuality of exchange does not imply equivalence in the value given by different participants to different elements of the 'knowledge' of teacher educators. This was clearly demonstrated as we worked collaboratively on this research. In our first workshop a passing comment made by a participant referred to the research project as 'your work' meaning 'university work'. This teacher then shared that her absence from school to participate in the collaborative research project was not seen as valid by her colleagues. However, later a teacher educator participant commented how she thought the best professional learning is through research.

We also recognise that there are the different cultures with different priorities and imperatives that exist in schools and universities that often make it hard to find common ground or perhaps even the neutral territory of a shared borderland. Instead, teacher educators are often found in the land of the other. Interestingly, within this collaborative research the teachers seem to have had a similar experience; working in the land of the teacher educator, not as a practitioner but as a researcher. This begs the question as to whether there is a borderland between schools and universities which constitutes a different cultural terrain where both teachers and teacher educators can share common ground and exchange knowledge.

BORDERLANDS

The differences in perspective noted before are indicative of the different cultures of university and school organisations (Cuban, 1992) and focus on issues of theory versus practice, the real versus the 'ivory tower', and whether teacher educators have credibility as practitioners and really understand the work of teachers today. For example,

I also think that there is the barrier that I’ve spoken of where there is, I don’t know if respect is the right word, but ... certainly the credibility of both from both points of view is not always there ... I think teachers who don’t continue studying are not accepting teacher educators once they’ve got their degree and they just think that they’re sitting in their ivory towers. (T Mary, 391-400)

Teachers, in particular, raise this as an issue. They mention that teacher educators do not understand aspects of a teacher’s professional life other than the core business of teaching in the classroom. These references, however, are often to do with the opportunities or possibilities for teacher educators to construct new knowledge about this wider role, rather than indicating that this is actually taking place. The many examples of what this other work might involve suggest that these teachers did not feel that aspects of their work within and beyond the classroom are widely understood by teacher educators. Teacher educators also mention these issues during their interviews, identifying “a great
divide between the two” but where “we increasingly place ourselves to learn from each other” (TE Sally 320, 327).

This placing of ourselves to learn from each other appears to be mediated initially through our shared experience as classroom teachers. Teachers stress the importance of teacher educators having themselves been classroom teachers in the past and teacher educators also highlight the importance of their previous experience within schools. Such ‘shared’ experience is not always seen as unproblematic and is, in some cases, seen as an impediment to teacher educators learning from teachers:

... teacher educators have been successful practitioners themselves and are still successful practitioners in relation to their own teaching on campus, as is often the case, that may well be an impediment to learning from teachers. I mean, there is almost that sense that because I have been a practitioner I actually do know this and this is where my legitimacy as a teacher educator lies – it is in my knowledge about practice and therefore I really don’t have anything to learn. It’s a bit of a catch twenty-two. Unless they did actually understand and have a lot of knowledge about practice and about education and schooling and all sorts of dimensions then they wouldn’t be successful teacher educators. But that then may become in some sense an impediment to us learning more. (TE Carolyn, 245-257)

Thus the way we position and view ourselves and each other may be one of the keys to creating a borderland and working collaboratively within it:

It’s the recognition of the particular value that individuals bring to the profession and that the value is different for different individuals and so it should be. We all bring different things but one is not privileged over the other. (TE Karen, 556-559)

But I think we need to explore how teachers’ knowledge could be given greater parity of esteem in terms of that knowledge being fed into campus based teaching etc. But it’s complicated by a whole lot of things like time, like the resources to do it and all of that sort of stuff. But I think it’s that it’s thinking about our work with the profession more in that sort of partnership sense I suppose. (TE Carolyn, 213-219)

It would seem that notions of partnership, parity of esteem and recognition of the particular contributions individuals make to the profession are ways in which individuals make more meaningful relationships for the co-construction of knowledge. This co-construction of knowledge goes some way to creating a borderland where the commonalities and differences in teachers’ and teacher educators’ knowledge are recognised and valued each by the other and by themselves.

CONCLUSION

As teacher educators and teachers we would suggest that the view of teacher education offered by Beattie (1997) and the knowledge embedded within it are appropriate to each of us irrespective of our particular contexts. Certainly as evidenced in this article the knowledge of teacher educators embraces the following dimensions:
• Teacher education involves the whole person – the personal and the professional are interconnected in the construction and reconstruction of professional knowledge.

• Learning to teach involves beginning with ourselves, learning to be responsive to others and reconstructing what is known in the light of new experiences.

• A professional knowledge of teaching has many dimensions – cognitive, social, organisational, practical, moral, aesthetic, person, political and interpersonal. The theory and the practice are inseparable.

• Learning to teach and teaching to learn require experiences and settings which support reflection, collaboration, relational learning and the creation of communities of inquiry.

• The construction and reconstruction of professional knowledge is a career-long process, not a single event. It is always a work in progress (Beattie, 1997, p.126).

The interview data suggest that there are views commonly held by both educators and teachers; for example, the importance of the development of a broad base of knowledge for teacher educators. Within this knowledge the importance of both theoretical and practical perspectives is also recognised. As might be expected, teachers value the practical more that the theoretical, but the practical is also highly valued by teacher educators.

Teacher educators also have the opportunity to access, often vicariously, knowledge of teachers’ contexts. The importance of contextual knowledge – or as Clandinin and Connelly (1996) describe it, the ‘professional knowledge context’ of teachers’ personal practical knowledge – clearly emerges as a significant feature of teacher educators’ knowledge. The construction of this knowledge is largely mediated by the access teacher educators have to teachers and to schools. This knowledge is crucial in their work within schools and supports the professional development of student teachers and teachers. It is a critical part of the knowledge they need to travel and translate between the worlds of the school and practitioner, and the world of the university. This contextual knowledge appears to be a critical feature of the borderland between theory and practice.

Yeatman and Sachs (1995) suggest that partnerships provide “the new rub between theory and practice” producing “more practically grounded, broadly informed theory” (p.45). The construction of the knowledge of teacher educators – theoretical, practical and contextual – occurs in many situations but this article reflects teacher educators’ knowledge construction through their interactions and interrelationships with teachers in a collaborative research partnership and in various other associations. This research has challenged the directionality of the exchange between teachers and teacher educators. The particular exchange from teachers to teacher educators is more often of the teacher’s personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge context not theoretical knowledge. There is, therefore, a need to document and acknowledge publicly the value of this knowledge and its importance in the construction of teacher educators’ knowledge if the voice of the practitioner is to be valued in its own right.

Much of the data reveals that the knowledge that teacher educators construct from and with teachers is framed by the concerns of both parties to bridge the divide between
theory and practice – between the school and the university. Much of the work on professional preparation also centres on the divide between theory and practice and addresses how this might be achieved through such strategies as educating the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1987) and problem-based learning (Savin-Baden, 1997). As well, there are various literatures that are arguably relevant to an understanding of the continuing development of professional practice, even though their main foci are somewhat different. These include research on the nature of expertise (Chi, Glaser & Farr, 1988), on workplace learning (Retallick & Groundwater-Smith, 1996) experiential learning (Boud & Edwards, 1998) and situated learning (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993).

Such strategies for bridging the divide need further exploration. However, we would suggest that dichotomies are counterproductive in helping to understand the ‘borderland’ between schools and universities. In this borderland the knowledge that teacher educators construct and reconstruct draws from both ‘theory’ and ‘practice’. It is constructed from teacher educators’ research on, with and for others and research on, with and for themselves. It is constructed from teacher educators working with and alongside teachers engaging first in the discerning use of narrative as “one way in which we can construct and assimilate our knowledge base in teacher education” (Weber, 1993, p71). It is constructed and reconstructed through our conversations with each other as suggested by Palinscar, Magnusson, Ford & Brown (1998). They argue that “a piece of the answer must reside in contemporary discussions of the social nature of learning” which speak to the “interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge” (p.6). It is constructed and reconstructed through our reflections on our practices that are part of this collaborative research project.

An important element of the borderland is the knowledge of professional knowledge contexts. In this research we have highlighted the importance of access to teachers’ professional knowledge contexts and to teacher educators’ knowledge construction since it appears to enable teacher educators working in the borderlands to translate and communicate within each of the particular landscapes in which they work. It might also be argued that the success of this research was due to the knowledge the teachers had of the professional knowledge context of teacher educators resulting from previous associations in the Innovative Links Project. This suggests that teachers who have access to the professional knowledge contexts of teacher educators, as in this project, may also be engaged in constructing and reconstructing their knowledge.

In this article we have shared the beginnings of the work of a collaborative research partnership between teachers and teacher educators where, as Yeatman (1996b) notes, there is the “development of a reflective clarification of the pragmatics of ordinary knowledge, interaction and social learning” (p.298). In doing so we have reflected as much on working in the land of the other as we have on the nature of a borderland. However, the traditional divide between theoretical and practical knowledge is transcended in some part through consideration of professional knowledge contexts. Issues such as whose knowledge counts, the nature of positioning in relation to the ‘other’, the
degree of mutuality of the exchange and credibility are highlighted in that they contribute to the ways of constructing knowledge in the borderland which are described here.

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NOTES

1. In 1997 the following teachers (Tony Acciano, Adriana Del Borrello, Chris Nedkoff, Lesley Payne, Dom Ricci, Judy Trewick, Jenny Waller) and teacher educators (Shirley Grundy, Anne Jasman, Judy Macadam, Judy Robison, Beth Powell, Lorraine Strickland, Dianne Tomazos) were involved in the project.
2. Participants at the October 1997 workshop included four teachers (Adriana Del Borrello, Lesley Payne, Judy Trewick, Jenny Waller) and six teacher educators (Shirley Grundy, Anne Jasman, Judy MacCallum, Judy Robison, Beth Powell, Lorraine Strickland, Dianne Tomazos).
3. On this page and following pages, 'TE' refers to 'teacher educator', 'T' refers to 'teacher', and the numbers refer to lines in the transcript.

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