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Early Career Teachers in Diverse Settings

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# Preface

*Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education for Early Career Teachers in Diverse Settings* provides an evidentiary basis for policy decisions regarding initial teacher education and beginning teaching, and also informs the design and delivery of teacher preparation programs.

Based upon rigorous analysis of international literature and the policy context for teacher education globally, and examination of data generated through a longitudinal study conducted in Australia, this book investigates the effectiveness of teacher education in preparing teachers for the variety of school settings in which they begin their teaching careers.

Over 4 years, the *Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education (SETE)* project tracked around 5,000 recently graduated teachers and 1,000 school principals in Australia to capture workforce data and gauge graduate teachers' and principals' perceptions of their initial teacher education programs. This book offers a synthesis of the research findings and uses the SETE work as a catalyst for innovative theorisation of the effectiveness of teacher education with regard to: graduate teachers' preparedness to meet the requirements of the diverse settings in which they are employed; the characteristics of teacher education programs that are most effective in preparing teachers to work in a variety of school settings; and the impact of the teacher education program attended on graduate employment destination, pathways and retention within the teaching profession.

The authorship comprises the researchers who were immersed in the SETE project, and who as a collective, were able to pool extensive experience in both schools and higher education institutions, and to offer unique perspectives on the status and future of teacher education. These perspectives are detailed to facilitate future-focused approaches to education reform; approaches that are informed by teacher education histories and reflect the complex associations between the education policy landscape, perceptions of teacher preparedness, teacher effectiveness and school contexts.

A strong partnership with two teacher regulation authorities and two state departments of education is at the heart of the SETE project resulting in a comprehensive and collaborative approach addressing important questions about preparing quality teachers, particularly for Australian schools.

The book provides teacher educators, regulators, education researchers and policymakers with a view into the complexity of teacher education and teacher workforce transitions. Grounded in national and international literature and communicated through expert commentary, the authors draw on graduate teacher voice and large-scale quantitative data sets to provide a full picture of Australian teacher education and to suggest how re-conceptualising teacher education as the collective responsibility of universities, schools, systems and communities within a newly created real or imagined third space has the potential to revolutionise schooling and learning teaching.

Sydney, Australia  
 Burwood, Australia  
 Waurm Ponds, Australia  
 Fitzroy, Australia  
 Burwood, Australia  
 Southport, Australia  
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The chief investigators included Diane Mayer, Andrea Allard, Richard Bates, Mary Dixon, Brenton Doecke, Alex Kostogriz, Leonie Rowan, Bernadette Walker-Gibbs and Simone White. We acknowledge with thanks the contributions also made by Jodie Kline, Philippa Hodder, Michelle Ludecke and Julianne Moss.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This book discusses the findings from Australia's first large-scale, mixed-methods, longitudinal study designed to investigate the effectiveness of teacher education:<sup>1</sup> *Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education* (SETE). The authors conducted this study in the context of increasing scrutiny of teacher education fed by various narratives of failure and the neoliberal reform agendas being promoted and enacted as solutions for the perceived problems associated with teacher education (Furlong 2013). In Australia, for example, in the last decade alone there have been no fewer than forty reports on various aspects of teacher education, each making recommendations for improvement. Interestingly, this sustained 'improvement' agenda has produced relatively little in the way of fundamental change in teacher education (Bates 2007). Moreover, despite frequent criticism, teacher education—as a field—has not articulated a response that speaks to the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs with which governments are prepared to engage (Rowan et al. 2015). Therefore, we set out to provide a large-scale evidence base to inform teacher education policy and accountability mechanisms that regularly drive political agendas and anecdotal claims of teacher education's (in)effectiveness.

In designing the study, we sought to understand: first, how effective graduates and principals perceived their teacher education programs to be in preparing the graduates for the diverse settings in which they take up teaching employment; second, whether there were any aspects of the teacher education programs that seemed to be linked to their preparedness for teaching and their effectiveness as beginning teachers; and third, the career and employment pathways of the new teachers as well as retention and attrition. Within the growing global crisis discourse about the quality of teacher education, our goal was to speak to teacher education policy and practice with our research amidst a view that teacher education

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<sup>1</sup>In this book, we use the term *teacher education* to mean *teacher preparation* or *initial teacher education*; that is, a program of pre-professional study qualifying graduates as eligible for teacher registration/credentialing and employment.

research to date is not sufficiently rigorous to speak to policymakers and/or investigating questions policymakers consider worthwhile.

However, it is important to understand that teacher education research is a relatively new field of research. As Linda Darling-Hammond (2016) reminds us, it was only a half a century ago in the US that Nate Gage highlighted the need for *research on teacher education* to add to the emphasis at that time of *research on teaching*. *Research for teacher education* evolved somewhat naturally from research on teaching and more recently, *research on and about teacher education* has emerged. We briefly track this history as a reference point for the purpose of our study and its approach.

## **Research on Teaching: Research *for* Teacher Education**

In the 1960s, ‘process-product’ research examined the relationships between measures of teacher behaviour (process) and measures of student learning (product) (Good and Brophy 1973) with teacher preparation involving training in acquiring specific skills that had been identified by this research as effective for teaching. The training focussed on the component sub-skills of teaching, learning about these sub-skills, observing them and then practicing them in demonstration schools or normal schools. Further, learning came from microteaching classes in teacher preparation institutions as videotaping technologies made it possible to capture teaching moments for close and collective interrogation post-lesson (Allen and Ryan 1969).

Subsequently, as ‘teacher thinking’ research came to prominence (Clark 1988), teacher education came to be conceptualised as professional learning, and research sought to distinguish what it was that expert teachers knew that differentiated them from novice teachers (Carter et al. 1987). However, critics argued that this research was little different from the earlier process-product research in that it focused on a few characteristics of teacher thinking and searched for predictors of teaching effectiveness (Shulman 1987). As a result, a new research trajectory emerged investigating teachers’ knowledge and how it is acquired, held and used (Grossman 1994; Shulman 1987; Wilson et al. 1987). This work introduced the particularly influential notion of *pedagogical content knowledge* as a ‘particular form of content knowledge that embodies the aspects of content most germane to its teachability’ (Shulman 1986, p. 9). At about the same time, research on teachers’ personal practical knowledge emerged, a kind of working knowledge permeated by the personal and professional experiences of teachers’ lives (Clandinin and Connelly 1987). In addition, growing interest in, and attention to, the meaning and practice of teaching as a reflective activity (Schon 1983) resulted in reflective practice becoming a major focus in teacher education programs (Schon 1987; Zeichner and Liston 1987). During these years, teacher education governance was largely the province of the institutions that offered the programs, and accountability in teacher education primarily emphasised process: ‘how prospective teachers learned to

teach, how their beliefs and attitudes changed over time, what kinds of pedagogical and other knowledge they needed, and what contexts supported their learning' (Cochran-Smith 2005, p. 10).

However, in the 1990s, countries across the world became increasingly anxious about their economic competitiveness fuelled by international comparators like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other OECD country comparison reports, as well as multinational companies like McKinsey and Co. conducting cross-country analyses (Barber and Mourshed 2007). As a result, teacher quality moved into the spotlight and from there a link to questions about the quality and impact of teacher education was made. Teacher education accountability moved from a focus on process and content to a focus on outcomes, specifically evidence of the impact of teacher preparation on student learning.

## **A Growing Need for Research *On* and *About* Teacher Education**

This growing attention to global economic competitiveness lead to international comparators like PISA being used to justify various government's large-scale reform agendas highlighting teacher quality (or the lack of) as a motivator for close scrutiny of teacher education, particularly as it happens in universities. In this way, teacher education came to be positioned as a 'policy problem' and when,

teacher education is defined as a policy problem, the goal is to determine which of the broad parameters that can be controlled by policymakers (e.g. teacher testing, subject matter requirements, alternate entry pathways) is most likely to enhance teacher quality (Cochran-Smith 2008, p. 273).

A crisis discourse ensued, with the claims that teacher education was broken but could be fixed by government intervention and national solutions (Cochran-Smith et al. 2013). Accompanying arguments often invoke binary oppositions in relation to how teacher education is conceived: university-based or -led teacher preparation versus alternative and/or innovative pathways; theory versus practice and so on. These arguments served to position universities and teacher education in universities in oppositional location to school-led and school-based programs such as Teach for America, Teach for Australia, Teach First, School Direct, and so on. However, as Whitty, (British Educational Research Association 2014; Feiman-Nemser 1990) reminds us, these simplistic characterisations of teacher education confuse the 'structural' arrangements of teacher education programs with their 'conceptual orientations'. Of course, teacher education is inherently political (Bates 2005; Cochran-Smith et al. 2013) and given the (dis)connection between policy and research, teacher education researchers are often 'on the back foot', particularly as the binary arguments are usually ideologically driven rather than evidence-based. Wiseman (2012) argues that policy should 'emerge out of research results and findings' but that this is not what currently happens. Instead,

policy is more likely to emerge from public perceptions, based on isolated anecdotes or support for recent educational fads or initiatives. In more cases than not, policy emerges quickly and without the benefit of research before or after mandated innovations are implemented (Wiseman 2012, p. 90).

Despite frequent criticism of initial teacher education, teacher education practitioners and researchers have not articulated a response that speaks to the effectiveness of their programs. As Grossman (2008) notes, ‘to respond effectively to critics, university-based teacher educators must be able to provide credible evidence of the effectiveness of their practice in preparing teachers’ (p. 14).

Reviews of teacher education research have concluded that the research base is characterised by isolated, often unrelated and small-scale investigations (Cochran-Smith and Villegas 2015; Cochran-Smith et al. 2015). In Australia, Murray et al. (2008) concluded that the relatively limited scope and scale of research that is currently undertaken:

can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the relative newness of teacher education research as a legitimate field of empirical investigation, the relatively small-scale funding that teacher education research is able to attract, and a recognition within the field of the importance of investigating aspects of one’s own practice in order to both understand and improve teacher education pedagogy (p. 235).

In the US, Sleeter’s (2014) analysis of almost 200 articles published in 2012 in leading international teacher education journals ‘did not see evidence of an emerging, shared research program designed to inform policy’ (p. 151). She concludes that the problem

is that the weight of the research, being fragmented, often narrowly focussed, and usually not directly connected to a shared research agenda on teacher education, does not position teacher educators strongly to craft an evidence-based narrative about teacher education that might counter policies and reports like the NCTQ’s<sup>2</sup> (Sleeter 2014, p. 152).

It is important to acknowledge that the findings from the many small-scale studies of teacher education have informed local teacher education practice in useful ways. Nevertheless, these studies do not produce the data sets that policymakers generally appear to be seeking and the prevailing view is that this body of work has not systematically built a knowledge base for teacher education policy.

It is clear that researching teacher education, and particularly its effectiveness, is not straightforward. The emergence of a ‘gold standard’ for educational research—the ‘scientific method’—and the associated ‘what works’ orientation preferred by many policymakers, often means ignoring the ‘need for critical inquiry into the normative and political questions about what is educationally desirable’ (Biesta 2007, p. 21). This is also highlighted in the AERA 2005 review of research and teacher education:

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<sup>2</sup>A 2013 Report from the National Council on Teacher Quality concluding that pre-service ITE is mired in mediocrity and does not improve student learning.