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What do ATEA people research and why?

Katarina Tuinamuana

Australian Catholic University, Sydney, New South Wales

Email: katarina.tuinamuana@acu.edu.au

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Abstract

This presentation takes as its starting point two review papers of research on teacher education in Australia (Murray, Nuttall & Mitchell, 2008; Nuttall, Murray, Seddon, & Mitchell, 2006) and proceeds to analyse the collection of papers presented at the recent 2011 ATEA conference. The purpose of the analysis is, firstly, to identify broad trends that emanate from particular characteristics of the research in terms of topic, broad area, theory & research methodology, and subsequent methods of data collection. A second focus of the analysis is to tie in the findings to current policy contexts in education, looking in particular at the potential broader impact of the research conducted by ATEA, the major professional & research association of teacher educators in Australia. An attempt is made to consider possible motivations for engaging in particular types of research by drawing on the data presented in each paper. The presentation ends with a discussion of possible future directions.

Keywords: Educational Policy, Researching Teacher Education, Theory in Teacher Education, Critical Review

Introduction

Good teacher education research can be many things, but one thing is clear – it is honest and important to its time and place. (Reid, Singh, Santaro and Mayer, 2011, p. 178)

Research has become integral to the work of teacher educators; its importance has grown rapidly in line with the movement of teacher education into the university academy over the last two decades both in Australia and globally. There are many reasons for this growing importance of research, but it is generally agreed by practitioners, scholars as well as policy makers that quality research is needed to effect positive change in both teaching and teacher education (Lin, Wang, Spalding, Klecka and Odell, 2011). However, it is also clear that, as Grossman (2008) has argued, ‘we seem ill prepared to respond to critics who question the value of professional education for teachers with evidence of our effectiveness’ (p.13), and that ‘we are producing too little research that is credible to the larger research community and to policy makers’ (p.16). Even where this type of research is available, there is also a question of how such research can acknowledge the moral, social and political interests in which all research and practice is embedded (Webster, 2008).

Given this context of the embedded role of research in the work of teacher educators, and the complexities that surround that role, it is fair to ask what sort of research we as teacher educators are doing, what is the impact, both perceived and ‘real’, of that

research, how this works within complex moral, social-cultural and political contexts, and what future directions suggest themselves in such a scenario.

This paper responds to some of these questions with a discussion of the initial results of an analysis of a set of peer-reviewed papers presented at a conference of the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA). The purpose of the analysis is, firstly, to identify broad trends that emanate from particular characteristics of the research in terms of topic, broad area, theory & research methodology, and subsequent methods of data collection. A second focus of the analysis is to tie in the findings to current policy contexts in education, looking in particular at the potential broader roles of the research conducted by ATEA, the major professional & research association of teacher educators in Australia. An attempt is made to consider possible motivations for engaging in particular types of research by drawing on the data presented in each paper. The paper ends with a discussion of possible future directions.

Background

The initial impetus for this paper came from a symposium at ATEA 2011 led by Marie Brennan & Lew Zipin (ATEA, 2011). The symposium aimed to ‘position work and research on teacher education in various Australian projects ... mapping our research to generate a ‘research program’ to put a wider context on what is already being done and organise links with others on similar projects’ (p.xxvii). This symposium identified some of the issues emerging from the Australian context on research in teacher education, and mapped future directions that could be taken. One of the suggestions made by the presenters was to analyse previous research presented at past ATEA conferences, and to use this as a learning experience for the future.

Based on this initial impetus, the starting point for an analysis of ATEA papers was an examination of two review papers of research on teacher education in Australia (Murray, Nuttall and Mitchell, 2008; Nuttall, Murray, Seddon and Mitchell, 2006). Murray et al. (2008) surveyed the teacher education research over the 1995-2004 period, looking at ‘number and type of research projects, key research themes and topics, range of methodologies, general strengths and weaknesses, and key trends’ (p.225). The requirements for inclusion in the final sample were that studies had to: be based on empirical research; be published in peer-reviewed journal articles; meet a set of basic quality criteria including clear aims, be contextualised in existing knowledge, theory, policy or professional practice; have a clear description of research participants and methods; describe any interventions being assessed; provide analysis of primary evidence; state the response rate for surveys. The final database for the review contained 215 papers.

From this survey, a number of interesting findings emerged. These are summarised in Tables 1, 2, and 3 below:

	<i>Table 1: Research topics & categories (Murray et al., 2008)</i>
1	A focus on four main clusters of research: mathematics and science preparation; information and communications technology (ICT) studies; reflection and reflective practice; and fieldwork supervision.
2	More than 25% of the full sample focussed on teacher preparation in mathematics and science.
3	Relatively little research on early childhood education as compared with primary and secondary levels.
4	About 70% of the studies were carried out within a single teacher education programme component.
5	Studies on attitudes, beliefs and self-efficacy showed a number of interesting findings, especially in studies about science and mathematics: pre-service teachers (PSTs) enter teacher education with negative views and misconceptions about mathematics; have low confidence, a lack of interest in, and misconceptions about science; significant numbers expressed belief in 'new age' and 'anti-scientific' beliefs.
6	Studies about subject content knowledge showed that significant numbers of students entered teacher education with poor knowledge of basic mathematical and scientific concepts such as decimals and air pressure.
7	Overall, the research on science and mathematics methods courses does not provide sufficient evidence to support any conclusions about their impact on PSTs beliefs, knowledge, or practice.
8	ICT research, although not always methodologically sound, showed that ICT is being used to good effect, but there was less clarity about learning outcomes for PSTs and their subsequent practice.
9	In the period under study, there was a sharp increase in research on reflection and reflective practice from a 1980s survey by Tisher (1987, 1990). But the Murray et al., (2008) review showed that there was a clear lack of follow-up studies to determine the longer term effects of this emphasis, and to what extent a reflective persona impacts positively on classroom practice.
10	Fieldwork supervision and mentoring continues to be a dominant area of research, but there is little research to examine issues surrounding the shortage of practicum supervisors, the status of the practicum in schools, and the accreditation and recognition of the task.

	<i>Table 2: Research Methodology (Murray et al., 2008)</i>
1	27% of the full sample used quantitative data only, with one-third of this group employing some form of an inferential statistical test. The remaining studies in this category used descriptive statistics only.
2	44% of the full sample used qualitative data only with a focus on narrative studies, case studies, and thematic analyses.
3	30% of the full sample presented both quantitative and qualitative data.
4	Overall, the main research methods used were surveys, interviews and content analysis.
5	About 10% of studies used observational research methods, but only 3 papers presented systematic observational data.
6	Experimental and longitudinal studies were rare.

	<i>Table 3: Some inferences from the review (Murray et al., 2008)</i>
1	The comparison with previous surveys on research on ITE shows that the quality and relevance of teacher education research had improved over the last three decades. However, there are areas of concern.
2	Research on initial teacher education (ITE) is characterised by isolated, small-scale investigations. This confirms findings from Tisher (1987, 1990).
3	The exception is in research on primary pre-service mathematics and science preparation.
4	Research on ITE lacks a critical mass of researchers with statistical expertise to do the kind of research that will extend small-scale, one-off investigations.
5	There is a need for studies that follow PSTs beyond their ITE and into their teaching career.
6	Overall, many of the studies were weakly theorised or atheoretical, lacking a clearly articulated conceptual basis.

The results and inferences discussed by Murray et al. (2008), and in an earlier paper using the same research data by Nuttall et al. (2006) indicate that, although research on teacher education in Australia is a growing field, there are some serious questions to be asked about this research, and its role in broader policy discussions. This is a complex area and there are diverse understandings about exactly what the relationship between research and policy should be, some of which are related to the ‘evidence-based practice’ debates (Hammersley, 2002; Greenhalgh and Russell, 2009; Webster, 2008). An analysis of these debates is not the subject of this paper, but it is important to state that the use of research as ‘evidence’ for policy and practice should be cognisant of the socio-cultural and political contexts of implementation. While Nuttall et al. (2006) and Murray et al. (2008) in their analysis of the survey of teacher education research do acknowledge this, they also make the very important point that ‘teacher education researchers themselves have to be prepared to engage in vigorous debates about what counts as research and what counts as good quality research’ (Nuttall et al. 2006, p.331). Part of this engagement should include an analysis of what we do both as researchers and as members of professional organisations like ATEA. This preliminary analysis of the set of papers presented at ATEA conferences signals one way to engage in these debates.

Methodology

This study uses a systematic review method to critically appraise, and synthesise a full sample of peer-reviewed conference papers presented at the 2011 ATEA meeting. A systematic review has many benefits including providing a wider-lens understanding of a multifaceted area of interest, identifying common threads across studies, as well as developing theory (Hammersley, 2002). The specific approach taken to the systemic review in this study is a critical ‘meta-ethnography’ approach as used by Noblit and Hare (1988) to carry out an interpretive analysis of qualitative data as research methodology. The aim of this approach is to synthesise and interpret a diverse set of data, rather than aggregate purely quantitative studies as used within a meta-analysis approach (Cooper, 2010). According to Atkins, Lewin, Smith, Engel, Fretheim, and Volmink, (2008), who use a more-structured form of meta-ethnography in public health research, this approach to research synthesis can potentially ‘provide a higher level of analysis, generate new

research questions and reduce duplication of research'. The advantage of such a systematic review is that it produces a holistic view of the area under study, one that is particularly useful when looking at the sometimes disparate research on teacher education.

The ATEA 2011 papers were downloaded from the ATEA website, and all 23 papers were included in this sample. Following on from Murray et al. (2006), the papers were then analysed for content looking for: number and type of research projects, key research themes and topics, range of methodologies, general strengths and weaknesses, and key trends. This was the extent of the replication of the study as, in terms of quantity and purpose, the two data sets were quite different. Whereas the Murray et al. study commenced with a full literature search of online databases, faculty websites, and systematic hand searches of selected journal titles, the current study used as its only data source the ATEA website of past conference proceedings. This reflected its purpose in examining content as presented at a professional teacher educator association rather than academic journals. As the major professional & research association of teacher educators in Australia, ATEA provides a forum for teacher educators to present and share their research with their peers in a collegial environment. As Nuttall et al. (2006) discovered, much of the teacher education literature surveyed did not proceed beyond conference presentations, even though they were peer-reviewed for the conference. There are many possible reasons for this, some of which have been identified by Nuttall et al., but the relevant issue for this current study is that the ATEA papers represent what might be termed 'on the ground' research interests and approaches. That is, the topics and areas of research were important enough to the teacher educators themselves, even if these papers did not proceed to formal peer-reviewed journal publication stage. Furthermore, the additional purpose of the current study is to try to ascertain the rationale behind the ATEA papers, and it may well be that there is scope here for further research investigating individual teacher educator responses to the analysis of their work, in order to discern a clearer picture of motive within personal and professional work contexts.

Findings: Numerical Data

A numerical overview is provided below in Table 4 and Table 5. A more detailed analysis and discussion follows in the subsequent section.

<i>Table 4: Tally of papers by research approach</i>		
Approach	Number	Percentage of total
Case study/evaluation	17	73.9
Case study/self-study/life-history	3	13.0
Longitudinal (mixed method)	2	8.7
Survey (quantitative)	1	4.3
Total	23	100.0

<i>Table 5: Tally of papers by key themes & topics</i>		
Theme/topic	Number	Percentage of total
PSTs beliefs and identity; self-efficacy	7	30.4
Partnerships in teacher education practice; mentoring	4	17.4
The work of teacher educators in an audit culture/neoliberal contexts	2	8.7
Indigenous teacher education programmes/quality	2	8.7
Professional learning/identity of teacher educators (self-study)	1	4.3
Relational Pedagogies	1	4.3
Impact of ICT innovation on beginning teachers	1	4.3
Impact of classroom realities on beginning teacher beliefs	1	4.3
International perspectives on teacher education	1	4.3
Long term teacher learning through professional development	1	4.3
Cross-faculty partnerships in universities	1	4.3
Teacher education course unit evaluation	1	4.3
Total	23	100.0

<i>Table 6: Scope of studies</i>		
Type of data	Number of papers	Percentage of total
Programme component	9	39.1
Cohort	8	34.8
Multi-institutional	2	8.7
Cross-national	0	0.0
Teacher Educators	2	8.7
N/A (no primary data)	2	8.7
Total	23	100.0

Discussion: Numerical data

It is clear that most of the papers presented at ATEA 2011 reported primarily on the situated practice of teacher educators. At a very broad level, there are some interesting comparisons that can be made with the findings of the larger survey of research into ITE 1995-2004, as reported by Murray et al. (2008). For example, as evidenced in the results section above, the large majority of studies as presented at ATEA 2011 tended to focus on

small scale, qualitative case studies reporting on teacher education practice, a finding similar to that of Murray et al. (2008).

As indicated in table 4, more than 70% of the sample papers used a case study/evaluation approach. Even with a relatively small sample of papers (n=23), this is a significant finding. For this analysis, a case study/evaluation approach is where the study is intended to provide an evaluation of some aspect of teacher educators' professional practice as defined within the case study. Furthermore, as evidenced in Table 6, this set of papers in the main reflected concerns central to single components either within one programme (39.1%) or across a number of units within a programme (34.8%). Moreover, out of the 23 papers surveyed, only 2 involved cross-institutional studies, and zero constituted cross-national studies. Murray et al. (2008) found that a much larger proportion of the papers surveyed looked at programme and cohort components, totalling 90%.

Because of the difference in sample size and approach to the reviews between this current study and that of Murray et al. (2006), any comparisons of data should be viewed carefully. Indeed, it is not the purpose of this paper to make direct comparisons. What is perhaps of more direct interest to the current paper is an analysis of the ATEA 2011 papers in terms of motivation and contextualisation within broader research. Of interest also is the perceived impact that this research is having, and consequently, the impact of ATEA as a professional body on broader policy and practice issues within teacher education

Analysis: Why do we research what we research?

This section will present an analysis of the rationale for each of the ATEA 2011 papers studied, providing a commentary on this data. An analysis of the 23 papers presented at ATEA 2011, revealed five categories of reasons behind our choice of research area and approach:

Rationale 1: To study our own work in changing neoliberal contexts

An interesting thematic area covered in the ATEA 2011 papers was on the work of teacher educators in an audit culture/neoliberal contexts (see Table 5 in this paper for a further breakdown of thematic areas). Two papers addressed this broad theme. In the first paper, Jackson, Ireland, Lim, and Hooper (2011) use the springboard of increased workload to introduce their paper:

Workload has increased as academic-teachers go in search of effective delivery modes, and are now expected to routinely deliver subject content online as well as in-class. Academic-teachers are being asked to ensure subject delivery is accessible, useable, secure, printable, interesting, interactive, up-to-date, well researched and multi-modality. This has led to many experiencing burnout and disillusionment as they increasingly feel bureaucratised and undervalued (p.1)

They then go on to ask a very important question:

If, as de Groot (1997), Henkel (2005), Nixon (2001) and Schwalbe (1985) suggest our faculties are places where we build our professional identities, and academic-teaching roles have traditionally been associated with high levels of autonomy, and if this autonomy is under threat through changes in regulative practice: would we be entirely amiss in suggesting that this threat (perceived or otherwise) may be a source of underlying tensions, divisions and isolationist culture? Further to this, does perceived threat to autonomy serve to constrain effective partnerships? (p.2)

The rationale behind their paper then is to address the work contexts that are undergoing rapid change brought on by the current accountability regimes, and the ‘audit-culture’ that has permeated all sectors of education, as well as to consider ways in which collaborative partnerships can go some way to alleviating the difficult work conditions that academics now find themselves.

The second paper that addresses the work of teacher educators is by Cullen and Williams (2011), entitled ‘The human price of the new economy for today’s teacher educators’. In this paper Cullen and Williams aim to redress the gap in the literature on the effect on teacher educators of new forms of management and control brought on by changes in broader socio-economic structures. The study is an ‘exemplar of Goodson’s notion of ‘middle ground’ theory as it highlights the tensions between macro structural forces impacting on teacher education and the micro-detail of daily life for teacher educators’ (p.4).

Rationale 2: To explore our own professional learning

Auld, Ridgway and Williams (2011), examine how innovative ways of assessing student learning is also a means by which teacher educators can explore their own professional learning.

Similarly, Elsdon and Jordan (2011) attempt to extend the research on the use of ICT to impact on student learning by exploring the potential offered by the *Illuminate* software that enables multiple ways of engaging including full audio, text and chat, whiteboard, multimedia applications within a web browser interface. They classify their study as small-scale but are interested in how this might inform their future practice.

Another paper that examined the authors’ own professional learning is that by Burke and Wheatland (2011). The researchers used a qualitative, self-study methodology in the research, but an additional component of the paper ‘focuses on the PSTs self-study on their learning through their involvement in the various initiatives’ (p.1). They were ‘particularly interested to examine if the learning experiences undertaken by our students are contributing to their deep professional knowledge and, furthermore, what the benefits are for the PSTs when structured learning experiences are conducted in authentic professional settings’ (p.4).

Likewise, the paper presented by Burrows (2011), in linking the academic to the personal, and focussing on relational aspects of pedagogy exemplified a rationale that

was based on professional learning, not only of the student that constituted the case study, but of her own learning as described below

Witnessing Selena's reflective journey as it unfolded was also a powerful experience for me as a teacher educator. It assisted me to more fully appreciate the holistic, relational and developmental journey towards becoming a teacher and to see how the links between different aspects of the program could be more effectively linked and integrated (p.5).

Rationale 3: To improve our own practice/to effect an evaluation of our courses or a broader programme

Rationale 2, as discussed above, can be further extended to a research aim of improving one's practice within broader contexts. The research presented by Tomas and Mills (2011) exemplifies this aim with a broader view of practice improvement, saying that their study aims 'support the School's efforts to embed Education for sustainability (EfS) into the program by informing ongoing development and refinement of the subject, and enhancing our ability to integrate EfS effectively by coming to understand better our local context and learners (p.2).

Furthermore, it was clearly emphasised that whereas previous studies as reported in the literature focussed on an examination of PSTs knowledge of, for example, environmental issues, their study was not intended to test PSTs knowledge, but to examine their 'awareness of sustainability issues and their **concern** for these issues' (p.2)

An examination of practice can also include general course evaluation. The research paper presented by Donnison and Edwards (2011) aimed to 'reconsider the intended learning outcomes, assessment, and teaching content to determine if the original aim of the subject is being met' (p. 3).

Finally, Adam (2011) presents a paper that introduces and illustrates a pedagogical tool for engaging the epistemic dimension of preservice teachers' pedagogical identity. A pilot study with 19 graduate level preservice teachers utilised the Binary Differential Grid (BDG) to engage the epistemic dimension of five binary constructs related to teaching. The study reveals the potential use of the BDG as a catalytic tool for epistemic development.

Rationale 4: To examine longer term issues through longitudinal studies especially those to do with the impact of ITE on the practice of beginning teachers

The sample used for this paper showed that only two studies were based on longitudinal approaches. Murray et al. (2008) in their review suggested that this was an area which needed attention. Hinds, Williamson and Gardner (2011) provide a good example of this type of research being carried out in the present time, and in their presentation to ATEA 2011 base their paper on the 'lack of local studies which follow a sample of beginning teachers from initial enrolment through to the conclusion of practicum school placement, exploring preconceptions and aspirations for themselves in their new role as professional educators' (p.1). This longitudinal study follows students from their ITE programmes

through to their actual classroom practice, and goes some way to filling the gap identified by Murray et al. (2008).

The second longitudinal study presented at ATEA 2011 was by Dyson and Plunkett (2011) who used their study to attempt to redress the dearth of research into alternate settings and related potential change within teacher education. This study not only identified an area that needed researching, but also provided a clear description of research and data collection methods, along with a clear conceptualisation of the theory underpinning the design. This level of clarity was not always evident in the sample under study for this paper.

Rationale 5: To provide reports & updates of funded projects and/or evaluations of pedagogical interventions

A number of studies provided reports and updates on funded projects and reported on evaluations of specified interventions in teacher education programmes. For example, Hudson and Hudson (2011) provide a report on the *Teacher Education Done Differently* (TEDD) project, funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), and describe how university units changed to include a stronger praxis development for preservice teachers. These changes are seen as important in that they respond to various education reviews recommending a stronger link between theory and practice, and the need to establish stronger collaborative links and partnerships between universities, schools, and the broader educational community. The actual research on which this paper is based shows that ‘the evidence from preservice teachers’ perceptions of their increased experience indicated that the extended school-based experiences were perceived to benefit their development’ (Hudson and Hudson, 2011, p. 8).

Similarly, van Rensburg Temmerman, Tamatea, Midgley, Dashwood, and Danaher (2011) presented a paper on a segment of a study funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. The paper addressed the question, ‘Which perspectives on and values of teacher education are evident in the project’s design and initial implementation?’. The paper presents findings that demonstrated ‘several potential examples of dialogical pedagogy and transnational knowledge exchange, while identifying some areas of potential divergence. This outcome reinforces the complexity as well as the significance of the nexus between the multiple perspectives on and the value(s) of teacher education, both in the institutions analysed here and inter/nationally’, (p.1).

Moriarty (2011) reported on the Mathematics for Initial Teacher Education (MITES) project, with a focus on developing self-efficacy and competence in both the subject mathematics and the teaching of mathematics.

Finally, Hall (2011) presents a commentary on the Indigenous Teacher Upgrade Program (ITUP), and discusses some of the successes and challenges in implementing a pilot programme in central Australia.

Rationale 6: To reflect on & analyse various partnership models, and issues of equity & social change

Parry, Yi, Harreveld, and Danaher (2011) report on a partnership model with the aim of identifying ‘strategies for teacher education schools and faculties and their diverse partners to enhance the mutual advantages of their partnerships’ (p.1). They analyse the effectiveness of their own partnership attempts against the broad issues identified by the literature as being of importance. In this sense then, the rationale behind their research seems to be to reflect on and analyse their own attempts at working across institutions and sections which may at times serve different interests.

In continuing the partnership theme, but from a slightly different angle, Lim, Hooper, Ireland, and Jackson (2011) report on cross-faculty collaboration in curriculum design. This paper discusses the ‘pedagogical, pastoral and pragmatic value of harnessing diverse perspectives in curricular design to provide first year students support in their transition to university’ (p. 2). Their rationale is to make up for the ‘paucity of research on the value of partnerships in supporting first year students’ (p.2).

Sempowicz and Hudson (2011) present a case study of a mentor working with one PST during the school-based teaching practicum. The study ‘demonstrated that a mentor who models reflective practices to the mentee and facilitates opportunities for the mentee’s reflections is likely to influence the mentee’s reflective practices and, subsequently, pedagogical development’ (p.18). According to the authors, ‘theoretical models have been proposed but few studies conduct investigations of practice within these models’ of mentoring, and the research that they carried out contributed to the ‘empirical evidence on effective mentoring practices’ (p. 2). Thus it would seem that the rationale behind this paper was presenting empirical evidence to support particular mode/s of mentoring within stronger partnership models.

Le Cornu’s (2011) study aimed to ‘fill a gap in the existing literature on professional experience with its focus on the school based co-ordinator role’. In this study the author is also building on previous research that she has done in this area, and perhaps sees the ATEA forum as one where a sense of continuity can be maintained in this particular research area.

There were a number of papers that looked to issues of equity, social change and social action within a broader view of partnership. For example, Bat (2011) aimed to generate discussion and action in the search for a more equitable approach in Indigenous teacher education.

The paper by Arnold, Edwards, Hooley, and Williams (2011) came into the partnership theme from a somewhat different angle where they are ‘grappling with these tensions and contradictions within the constraints of university and school requirements, as well as a neoliberal economy’ (p. 1) and reports on ‘innovative pre-service programs that are attempting to develop the protocol further by incorporating practice imagined and practice re-imagined so that more inclusive forms of schooling are available for all school

students' (p. 2). They describe their research as 'aspirational' but also say that 'given the dominance of neoliberal ideology at present, it must be stated that prospects for Philosophical Project Knowledge as we describe are unlikely in most teacher education programs' (p. 10).

Finally, although all the papers presented had an implicit aim of adding to knowledge in the area, one positioned this as the specific rationale guiding the paper in that it sought to 'add to the critical debate on whether collaborative professional learning changes teachers' practice and what sustains the learning over the longer term in schools' (p. 1) (Beveridge, 2011). The strength of this lies in the attention paid to both the long term and the broader view being articulated.

Some issues

In a recent editorial of the Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, the editors make the following observation about the papers included in that edition:

These teacher education researchers have investigated and theorised their own practices, positioned their studies within the available and relevant work in the field and then added to that body of knowledge with new findings, often also setting agendas for future research. They reflect the valuable work of teacher education research (Mayer, Singh, Santoro, and Reid, 2012, p.79)

The ATEA 2011 papers discussed here have contributed much to our understandings of teacher education generally, as well as to the processes that underpin the activities of research and writing. An analysis of the 23 papers also indicated some areas that needed development if the research is to have broader significance and impact.

Firstly, as indicated by Mayer et al. (2012) in the quotation above, valuable teacher education research positions itself in available and relevant work in the field. There is a need to link current research to other studies previously done. It is understandable that when we research our own practice, there might not be a need for such broad-based contextualisation; however, if our intention is to make contributions to broader debate, then this is an issue that must be considered. Secondly, there is also room for a clearer articulation of research design details, a point also made by Nuttall et al. (2006) and Murray et al. (2008)

As the major professional and research association of teacher educators in Australia, and well-recognised as such, ATEA and its members are ideally placed to take the lead in defining and expanding the research agenda needed to deal with current issues in education and policy. Indeed, this is what its mission statement encapsulates. The breadth and depth of the research analysed in this paper would suggest that this is already being done. However, it is also clear that there are possible future directions that can be taken in this regard. For example, one of the major findings of both this study and that of Murray et al. (2008) is that teacher educators tend to participate in small scale, one-off studies, that largely inform their own practice. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and reflects the kind of work and motivations that teacher educators have. But what might be important is to consider ways in which this research can be harnessed to produce broader impact.

Given that a large majority of studies on teacher education are qualitative in nature, one starting point might be to carry out several qualitative meta-analyses of a number of broad areas of interest, following the methodologies, for example, suggested by Atkins et al. (2008). This would also work to establish a mapping of research to generate research programmes that facilitate links with others on similar projects, as suggested by Brennan and Zipin (ATEA, 2011). Importantly, it will also provide a platform for a stronger contribution to current policy debates.

Conclusion

It is clear that the papers surveyed for this study did not always meet the standards set by Murray et al. (2008). But what is less clear is why, and to what extent does the shortfall matter. There is much scope here for a study that looks at the research experiences of teacher educators, their evolving relationship with research, and the possible impact that new accountability regimes are having on teacher educators, and the academy more broadly. There is also scope for a study of how academics now approach invitations to attend and present at conferences. In the days when measurement and outputs discourses did not dominate expectations, many academics attended conferences to share a budding idea, not necessarily to shore up points in their own measurement tally, and consequently that of the university that they were affiliated to.

This brings to the fore the vexed issue of funding, the ‘bogey’ and the ‘invisible ogre’ of the modern world of the academic/teacher educator. Louden (2008) suggests that universities are constantly having to do ‘more with less’, with, for example, the federal government not responding to recommendations by the 2007 House of Representatives Inquiry, *Top of the Class*, to make significant increases to funding offered to teacher education programmes within universities. He goes on to say that:

In the absence of adequate funding, Australian teacher education continues to be characterised by a poor public and professional image and uncertainty about its impact on practice, and methodological preferences about research that prevent teacher educators from making a persuasive case about impact – or about levels of funding that would be required to increase the impact of teacher education on the outcomes of schooling (p.358).

Much of the work that teacher educators now do centres around funding, and the complex structures that underpin how much a university can obtain from its worker academics. Thus in many ways, the work of teacher educators is somewhat dependent on how much funding they can earn on behalf of their institutions. There is therefore the question of the extent to which teacher educators and academics as a group are now, to use a colloquialism from economics, expected to be ‘cash cows’ for universities. This dominant discourse pushes teacher educators to ‘play the game’ if they want to remain in the game. (Fairclough, 1993; Zipin, 1999; Tuinamuana, 2011). Fairclough (1993) suggests that in playing this game where the rules are set up by structures external to the worker in higher education, we are ‘parodying an alien discourse’ and that

Doing one's job entails 'playing the game' (or various connected games) and what may feel like a mere rhetoric to get things done quickly and easily becomes a part of one's professional identity. Self-promotion is perhaps becoming a routine, naturalized strand of various academic activities, and of academic identities (p.153).

Notwithstanding this broader analysis, there are many ways in which teacher educators can continue to remain committed to their core responsibilities of teaching, research, and knowledge production, some of which have been discussed in this paper. The opportunity to present and critically discuss our research at fora like the ATEA conferences, and to set up networks that critically shape both good research and good practice will go a long way to helping us consolidate the influence that we have as a group on broader policy discussions.

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