

Learning as Central to Being and Becoming: expert teachers' personal professional development and learning

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all who negotiate the disruptive dissonance of their own learning and who bravely share the journey of their developing expertise. I applaud their ongoing commitment that endows us with the creation of new knowledge and celebrates the understanding of self in sharing experience with others.

To Brian, who has helped me to see differently and has forever altered my capability for critique.

Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

Date:

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Contents

DEDICATION	I
CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
CONTENTS	VII
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	XI
Tables	xi
Figures	xi
ABSTRACT	XIII
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	XV
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Rationale for my research	1
1.2 Significance of the research	4
1.3 Scope of the thesis	8
1.4 Chapter discussion	10
CHAPTER 2 NOTIONS OF DEVELOPING EXPERTISE AND PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Distinguishing between experience and expertise	12
2.3 Teachers' personal professional development and learning	25
2.4 Chapter discussion	39
CHAPTER 3 COMPATIBLE DUAL METHODOLOGIES AND COMPLEMENTARY HERMENEUTIC UNDERSTANDINGS	43
3.1 Introduction	43
3.2 A constructivist perspective	44
3.3 The lens of hermeneutic phenomenology	53
3.4 Process for encouraging expert teacher participation	61
3.5 Gathering of meaning representations	66
3.6 Analysis of meaning representations	77
3.7 Chapter discussion	84
CHAPTER 4 LINCOLN'S LEARNING MOTIVATION: HEART, HAPPINESS AND WHOLE PERSON	87
4.1 Introduction	87
4.2 Lincoln's story	88
4.3 Narrative modes of storytelling	98
4.4 Chapter discussion	106
CHAPTER 5 SALLY'S EXPERIENTIAL ORIENTATION: TANGIBILITY, FEEDBACK AND SELF-REGULATION	115
5.1 Introduction	115
5.2 Sally's story	116
5.3 Narrative modes of storytelling	126

5.4 Chapter discussion	132
CHAPTER 6 ROSEMARY'S DETERMINED PROFESSIONALISM: RESILIENCE, PASTORAL CARE AND PROFESSIONALISM	141
6.1 Introduction	141
6.2 Rosemary's story	142
6.3 Narrative modes of storytelling	154
6.4 Chapter discussion	161
CHAPTER 7 BRENDÀ'S LEARNING HORIZON: EMOTIONAL POSITIVITY AND ACCEPTING CHANGE	169
7.1 Introduction	169
7.2 Brenda's story	170
7.3 Narrative modes of storytelling	180
7.4 Chapter discussion	188
CHAPTER 8 KEN'S ESTABLISHED PEDAGOGY: RESISTANCE, LIMITATIONS AND EMOTIONAL SUFFERING	195
8.1 Introduction	195
8.2 Ken's story	196
8.3 Narrative modes of storytelling	207
8.4 Chapter discussion	218
CHAPTER 9 LEARNING AS CENTRAL TO BEING – CONSTRUCTING MEANING IN BECOMING AN EXPERT TEACHER	231
9.1 Introduction	231
9.2 Experience and insight: perception within relational and communicative spaces	232
9.3 Learning through risky, uncertain and seemingly impossible 'disruptive dissonances'	253
9.4 Chapter discussion	287
CHAPTER 10 POSSIBILITIES FOR PRACTICE, POLICY AND RESEARCH WITHIN TEACHER PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	293
10.1 Introduction	293
10.2 Theoretical compatibility and complementary understandings	296
10.3 The personal nature of professional development and learning: narratives of being and becoming an expert teacher	298
10.4 Distinguishing expertise from experience: expert teachers' third space thinking	307
10.5 Sharing the language of teaching and learning through storytelling	311
10.6 Living with uncertainties of being and becoming whilst rejecting the dichotomy of expert versus non-expert	315
10.7 Promoting professional learning communities: linking theory and practice, resonating individuality and collegiality, and the mutuality of being and becoming	318
10.8 Suggestions for future research	322
10.9 Conclusions	324
REFERENCES	327
APPENDICES	353
APPENDIX A UTS RESEARCH DOCUMENTATION	355
Appendix A.1 UTS ethics approval letter	355
Appendix A.2 Information letter	356
Appendix A.3 Consent form	358
APPENDIX B IDENTIFYING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS FOR MY RESEARCH	361

Appendix B.1 Teaching expertise criteria	361
Appendix B.2 Snowballing email to identify research participants	363
APPENDIX C MY PHD WIKI	365
Appendix C.1 Home page	365
Appendix C.2 Teaching Expertise Research Criteria page	366
Appendix C.3 References page	367
APPENDIX D EMAILS FOR PARTICIPANT CONFIRMATION AND REVIEW	373
Appendix D.1 Confirming offer to participate in PhD research	373
Appendix D.2 Keeping your details for a later research stage	374
Appendix D.3 Confirming meeting: time and place	374
Appendix D.4 Reviewing interview transcript	375
Appendix D.5 Reviewing second interview transcript	375
Appendix D.6 Thank you	376
Appendix D.7 Reviewing text: professional development and learning journey	377
APPENDIX E SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDES	379
Appendix E.1 Narrative oral history experiences	379
Appendix E.2 Phenomenological lifeworld	381
APPENDIX F COMPUTER SOFTWARE	383

List of Illustrations

Tables

TABLE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIVE TEACHERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE RESEARCH.	69
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Figures

FIGURE 1: CENTRAL CONCEPTS FROM THE RESEARCH LITERATURE.	12
FIGURE 2: PROCEDURES FOR SELECTION OF EXPERT TEACHERS.	61
FIGURE 3: SPIRALLING PROCESSES IN GATHERING AND ANALYSING THE REPRESENTATIONS OF MEANING.	77
FIGURE 4: EXPERT TEACHERS' PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND APPROACH TO LEARNING.	311

Abstract

This thesis explores the development and learning experiences of secondary school teachers who have been identified by their colleagues for their teaching and learning expertise. The thesis employs a dual methodological approach – narrative inquiry and phenomenological inquiry – to present unique interpretations of the personal professional learning journeys of five teachers. Viewed through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology these compatible dual methodologies reveal complementary hermeneutic understandings of the five teachers' personal professional development and learning. This constructivist study employs qualitative research methods that include criterion sampling, a snowballing process for the nomination of teachers by their colleagues, and a process of three interviews with each teacher across a time period of several months.

By interrogating expert teachers' personal professional learning the thesis uncovers new understandings about the development of expertise. Narrative analysis of the teachers' stories reveals both post-reflective understandings and the pre-reflective sense contained within their experiences. In analysing the teachers' constructions of meaning, the thesis posits the centrality of personal professional learning within the lifeworld of expert teachers. Four of the five journeys emphasise the contextual factors that have shaped their personal professional development: a belief in risk-taking for developing expertise, a lifelong learning attitude, and a dynamic approach to change in personal professional development. Applying phenomenological analysis reveals the distinctly different lifeworld experience of the fifth teacher and allows the study to distinguish teacher insight from experience.

The thesis also argues that a phenomenological constituent of 'disruptive dissonance' is necessary for the ontological third space within the personal professional development of expert teachers. This thesis theorises that third space thinking is necessary to negotiate the problematics essential for the development of teaching expertise. This thinking is evident through a philosophy of openness, which encourages the creation of communicative, collaborative pedagogy and the avoidance of professional isolation; a confrontation of uncertain challenges to realise these as developmental opportunities; and a developmental awareness of prevailing through becoming an expert while accepting the acknowledgement of being an expert.

The thesis concludes by proposing that three professional learning principles are essential for the development of teacher expertise. These are sharing the language of teaching and learning through storytelling; living with the uncertainties of being and becoming while rejecting the dichotomy of expert versus non-expert; and promoting professional learning communities that encourage the linking of theory and practice, the resonance between individuality and collegiality, and the mutuality of being and becoming.

Glossary of Terms

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL): “The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) came into being on 1 January 2010 ... AITSL has responsibility for: rigorous professional standards fostering and driving high quality professional development for teachers and school leaders working collaboratively across jurisdictions and engaging with key professional bodies” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2014). The AITSL website has been developed in collaboration with Education Services Australia (2014), which is the legal entity for the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) (2012).

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers: In Australia, the National Professional Standards for Teachers were endorsed by Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in December 2010. The National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012) replace the previously formulated state-and territory-based standards from disparate professional associations and government bodies. The standards provide a basis for professional accreditation and present a framework for professional learning to enable teacher self-reflection and self-assessment.

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL): English as a Second Language is synonymous with English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and refers to English as taught to non-English speakers in a country where English is a native language, such as Australia, the United States of America or England. ‘ESOL’ was introduced after ‘ESL’ but came to be regarded as too limiting. TESOL is now used as it includes non-native speakers of English who speak more than one other language (Association for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ATESOL), 2012).

Coordinator, head teacher and other promotional classifications within Australian schools: ‘Head teacher’ or ‘coordinator’ is a promotional classification of special responsibility within a school as stipulated within the relevant employment award or workplace agreement (Catholic Commission for Employment Relations, 2011; Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales, 2009; The Association of Independent Schools of NSW Ltd, 2012).

Aligned terms include school principal or school head teacher, deputy principal or deputy head teacher, subject area head teacher or subject coordinator, and year group coordinator or pastoral care coordinator. The levels for leadership or coordination role responsibilities are stipulated within each school system and are referenced using various terms. For example, teachers in government secondary schools are classified at specific pay levels, e.g. Schedule 1 Common Incremental Salary Scale, and extra coordination or leadership responsibilities are designated as higher duties, e.g. Schedule 2 Allowances (Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales, 2009). The designated role responsibility of a head teacher i.e. listed in Schedule 4 Salaries - Promotion Classifications in the Teaching Service (Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales, 2009) in a non-government secondary school is comparable to the Leadership Level 2 i.e. listed in Table 5 Other Allowances (Association of Independent Schools of NSW Ltd, 2012) as well as the Coordinator 2 level i.e. listed under Promotion Positions (Catholic Commission for Employment Relations, 2011) in non-government secondary schools. These may then be colloquially referred to as a two-point coordinator.

Higher School Certificate (HSC): The Higher School Certificate (HSC) is a locally, nationally and internationally recognised qualification for students who successfully complete senior secondary education in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW Government, 2012b). For senior secondary school students, the preliminary course is completed in Year 11 and the HSC course culminates in examinations at the end of Year 12.

HSC performance bands: “HSC marks for each course are divided into bands and each band aligns with a description of a typical performance by a student within that mark range. The performance bands and descriptions give meaning to the HSC mark. For a 2 unit course, Band 6 indicates the highest level of performance” (NSW Government, 2012c).

Independent Schools Teacher Accreditation Authority (ISTAA): The ISTAA is an independent schools organisation that is “responsible for the accreditation of teachers at the levels of: Proficient Teacher (ACT Teachers, ACT Preschool Teachers & NSW Preschool Teachers); Experienced Teacher (NSW & ACT Teachers and Preschool Teachers); Professional Excellence (NSW Teachers and Preschool Teachers); Highly Proficient Teacher (ACT Teachers and Preschool Teachers)” within the Australian state of NSW (Independent Schools Teacher Accreditation Authority (ISTAA), 2011).

Key Learning Area (KLA) within the Australian curriculum: Key Learning Area (KLA) is an identifier for the specialist content area of the relevant NSW syllabus (New South Wales Government & Board of Studies NSW, 2012a). Each learning area is under ongoing development at a national level within the Australian curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2012a).

Middle school years within Australian schools: The middle school years span childhood to adolescence from age 10 to age 15 (The Middle Years of Schooling Association (MYSA), 2012). In Australia, a middle schooling program specifically caters for students from Years 5 through to 8. A middle school structure aims to transition Year 7 students from their primary school class, with one main teacher of core curriculum, to two teachers sharing a class in teaching across the core secondary curriculum. These schools are not common within the government school system in Australia and are represented mostly within independent schools of the non-government school sector.

My School website: “My School enables you to search the profiles of almost 10,000 Australian schools. My School is an Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) information service. ACARA is an independent authority with functions including the publishing of nationally comparable data on all Australian schools” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2010).

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN): In Australia, students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are assessed on the same days annually using nationally developed tests in “reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2012b). This annual assessment is colloquially referred to as NAPLAN.

National Curriculum Statutory Assessments: In the UK, these are national assessments at the end of each key stage, which are identified as: Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (age 5); Key Stage 1 (KS1) tasks and tests during Year 2 (usually age 7); Key Stage 2 (KS2) National Curriculum tests in English and Maths taken at the end of Year 6 (usually age 11); and Key Stage 3 (KS3) teacher assessment judgments at the end of KS3 (usually age 14) (UK Department for Education, 2012; UK Government’s Digital Service Directgov, 2012a).

New scheme teacher: A person who has not taught in NSW prior to 1 October 2004 or a person returning to teaching in NSW after an absence of five or more years (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2004).

New South Wales (NSW): The Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) (NSW Government, 2012a).

NSW Institute of Teachers accreditation and standards: The NSW Institute of Teachers is the Teacher Accreditation Authority (TAA) for teachers employed within the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2004). A teacher in Australia gains accreditation through the relevant Teacher Accreditation Authority (TAA) for their state or territory. The NSW Institute of Teachers professional standards map to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, which identify the four career stages for teacher accreditation as: Graduate; Proficient; Highly Accomplished; Lead (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2012). From 2014, the functions of the NSW Institute of Teachers became part of the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) (NSW Government, 2014).

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED): In the UK, OFSTED reports directly to Parliament as an independent and impartial body. It is responsible for inspection and regulation of “services which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages” (Office for Standards in Education Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED), 2011). It provides the framework used to conduct school inspections and publish the results in reports online.

Record of School Achievement (RoSA): In NSW, attainment of a School Certificate formerly marked the end of the key curriculum stage for the completion of junior secondary school in Year 10. “From 2012, eligible students who leave school before receiving their Higher School Certificate will receive the NSW Record of School Achievement (RoSA)” (New South Wales Government & Board of Studies NSW, 2012b).

Standardised Assessment Testing (SAT): A standardised assessment test in the United States of America that allows high school students to complete common entrance examinations that are recognised by all tertiary institutions. “The SAT is a globally recognized college admission test that lets you show colleges what you know and how well you can apply that knowledge. It tests your knowledge of reading, writing and math — subjects that are taught every day in high school classrooms. Most students take the SAT during their junior or senior year of high school, and almost all colleges and universities use the SAT to make admission decisions” (The College Board, 2010).

United Kingdom (UK) AS and A levels or vocational level qualifications: In the UK, A and AS levels are among the main routes into tertiary education. Vocational entry-level qualifications provide preparation for further learning and work, while level 3 qualifications are equivalent to A levels (UK Government’s Digital Service Directgov, 2012b). This level may colloquially be referred to as the traditional ‘sixth form’, which can be completed at a secondary school, college or similar institution.

