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Experienced teacher educators hunting assumptions to examine their pedagogy: An international collaborative study

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The research presented in this article focuses on an international collaboration conducted by four experienced teacher educators who used assumption identification and examination to advance pedagogical practice. It describes and examines how teacher educators deliberately undertook reflective practices to inform and enhance teaching. Four vignettes are described and analyzed—*Practica woes* and *Modelling practice*—and examined using the simple, complicated, and complex teaching framework. The key outcomes include the impact and role of assumption definition, identification, and examination as powerful reflective tools. Researching practice in teacher education is an effective way to advance pedagogical knowledge and practice and a disposition of inquiry is necessary to enhance knowledge at all stages of teacher educator experience. This international collaboration highlights the importance of problematizing teaching, continually inquiring into and interrogating practice and grasping the teachable moments.

KEYWORDS

reflective practice, assumptions, self-study methodology, vignettes, teacher education

Introduction

In Hans Christian Andersen's story of "The Emperor's New Clothes" (1837), the emperor looked at himself from every angle in the mirror and buoyed by the courtesans' admiration, pronounced that he looked very fine indeed! Everyone was willing to share in the collective ignorance of an obvious fact despite individually recognizing the absurdity of the situation lest they be seen as fools. In much the same way it is also possible to perceive of reflective practice as an illusionary device to reflect what the viewer wants to see or a carefully scripted exercise, portraying an image that has no real substance. Bolton (2005) claimed "The metaphor [reflection] embodies is limited: a mirror reflection is merely the image of an object directly in front of it – faithfully reproduced back to front" (p. 4).

Such perceptions make us highly sensitive to the term *reflection*, which may have been overused in education practice to the point where, in some situations, it has come to mean little more than an in-depth consideration of practice. As [Ovens and Tinning \(2009\)](#) have shown, reflection is highly situated and is enacted differently in different settings. Given this, reflection may not be overly helpful in advancing understanding of practice, generating new knowledge or disrupting the status quo unless there is some means of gaining a new angle to enable a new line of sight. One way to make reflection transformative is to identify our assumptions and then to assess their accuracy ([Brookfield, 1995](#)). Checking with others for their perception leads to new ways of thinking and enables a new line of sight.

The research presented in this article focuses on an international collaboration conducted by four experienced teacher educators who used assumption identification and examination to advance pedagogical practice. There are commonalities among the team, including that we were all qualified teachers who have transitioned to be tenured, senior academics in a university context. We have used reflection and researched our practice to innovate and understand our pedagogy. However, we have discovered that practices, assumptions, and beliefs can become sedimented over time. We have used assumption identification as a means of *stirring the sediment* to understand more about the advanced and nuanced ways we interpret and enact our teacher education pedagogy.

As teacher educators we are aware that supporting student teachers in their journey of learning to teach can be problematic. [Darling-Hammond \(2006\)](#) summarized these problems as the “Apprenticeship of Observation” where student teachers have well-developed ideas about the characteristics of good teaching, most of which are tacit and unexamined; the “Problem of Enactment” where student teachers often find it difficult to enact the propositional ideas that they have learned from their teacher education coursework and; the problem that teaching is “Dynamic and Complex” necessitating teachers attend simultaneously to multiple, competing contextual factors in the relationships among students, subject matter, and themselves.

Reflection in and on practice

The importance of the role of reflection in and on practice was integral to the work of each of the authors. Reflection has been promoted as a core aspect of being and developing as a professional educator ([Brandenburg, 2008](#); [Ovens and Tinning, 2009](#)). It is actively promoted as something that thoughtful and skillful teachers practice to make sense of the complexity of teaching situations, to question their actions and to view them from different perspectives. There has also been increasing attention on how reflection facilitates the transition from being a teacher to becoming a teacher educator ([Dinkelman et al., 2006](#); [van Velzen et al., 2010](#); [Bullock, 2012](#)). However, less attention has been paid to how experienced teacher educators undertake reflection to

inform their own practice. In this article we explore how our collaboration facilitated renewed reflection on our established teacher education practices. Specifically, we focus on how we use the concept of assumption hunting to examine key events from our own experiences. Each of us held assumptions which were surfaced as we discussed the vignettes we had written.

For the research presented in this article, we have broadly defined an assumption as “the taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and our place within it that seem so obvious to us as not to need stating explicitly” ([Brookfield, 1995](#), p. 2). We hunted for our assumptions to challenge ourselves to think differently, more consciously about our practice. As [Brookfield \(1995, p. 2\)](#) suggests, “unless reflective practice challenges the assumptions, particularly the hegemonic assumptions, that stifle teachers’ ability to work outside their own limiting perspectives, the reflective process is largely ineffective and not worthwhile.

Theoretical perspective: Assumption identification and assumption hunting

The research draws heavily on the work of Stephen Brookfield, an expert in critical reflective inquiry and the role of identifying and challenging assumptions to enhance understanding, dispositions, skills, and pedagogy in teacher education. Brookfield suggests that there are, at least, three different types of assumption. He refers to paradigmatic assumptions as those structuring assumptions we use to order the world into fundamental categories. These assumptions are the most difficult to surface. Prescriptive assumptions are assumptions about what we think ought to be happening in a particular situation. Causal assumptions are assumptions about how different parts of the world work and the conditions under which these can be changed ([Brookfield, 2017](#)). This research focuses on disorienting and challenging dilemmas, dilemmas that prompt educators to think differently about practice. [Larrivee \(2000\)](#) also argues that “unless teachers engage in critical reflection and ongoing discovery they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations” (p. 294). To scrutinize our assumptions as teacher educators, we focused on the lens of personal experience ([Brookfield, 2017](#)). For much of our careers we employed multiple lenses to examine and scrutinize our practice, including through our students’ eyes, our colleagues’ perceptions, and theory. Turning attention inwards has allowed us to identify and revisit our assumptions and experiences and as [Brookfield \(2017\)](#) suggests, further examine “the rich vein of experience that can be mined for insights into the power dynamics of teaching” (p. 154).

In the following sections of this article, we discuss vignette writing and its role in unpacking our assumptions; we describe and analyze the four vignettes (*Practica woes* and *Modelling practice*) and examine the outcomes within the simple, complicated, and complex teaching framework ([Glouberman and Zimmerman, 2002](#)).

Materials and methods

Vignette writing

Teacher educator vignette writing has traction with researchers as a means of capturing and narrating stories of practice (Jeffries and Maeder, 2005; Skilling and Stylianides, 2020).

While there is little consensus as to the definition and practice of vignette writing, we adapted the suggestion from Jeffries and Maeder (2005) for criteria to guide our work:

- (1) It is a story. It is a narrative but not a dialog, case study, case story, or scenario.
- (2) It is short. Its length is around 300 words.
- (3) It is relevant. It simplifies a real-life situation that is relevant to participants.
- (4) It allows for multiple solutions/answers and is intended to encourage independent thinking and unique responses.

Our aim in using vignettes was to articulate an experience that had caused us consternation. Initially we shared these electronically, then met online to discuss them in more depth and to draw together the common threads. In the following section, we present four vignettes selected from many stories we tell of and about our practice. We begin with two vignettes which are contextualized by our experiences of practicum. Lynn's and Alan's vignettes illustrate the tensions felt by student teachers and lecturers as they navigate the "real world" of teaching. We discuss these and surface the assumptions we hold about our roles, the agency that students may or may not have and the importance of ensuring that practicum is just seen as another context to learn about professional practice.

Dawn's and Robyn's vignettes both describe role playing situations in their classes where they attempted to simulate "real" and authentic school experiences in their university settings. These vignettes are underpinned by the assumption that teaching is complex. Although we may use the word freely, these vignettes made us realize that student teachers and teacher educators alike may in fact find it difficult to explain why teaching is complex and not complicated.

Practicum woes

Vignette 1: Lynn

Constance hung around after a session, obviously waiting to ask me a question. I knew she had had a disappointing practicum experience because I had just been reading the associate teacher reports. I was actively involved in organizing practice within our program as well as attempting to create connections between practicum experiences and learning and my courses. I should have known that students, associate teachers and visiting

lecturers would have different expectations and understanding about what and how student teachers learn from practicum experiences.

Course work in my university program was competency-based, meaning student teachers learnt to do things such as lesson-planning, creating activities and presenting them in their coursework, but the context remained hypothetical and abstract because the practicum came after the coursework was completed. Student teachers did not see the connections between the activity and the needs of the pupils until the course was over. They could not directly apply what they learned at the university in the classroom because the university course could not consider the needs of individual pupils, the associate teacher's approaches and beliefs, the materials available, the need for continual adaptation and adjustment, etc.

While I saw practicum experience as a site for student teachers to learn about aspects of their profession that were not so easily explored in other situations and to practice teaching, they saw it differently. From their perspective the practicum was a performance where they had to show a substantial level of expertise from the beginning because of the high-stakes evaluation associated with the field experience. Rather than seeing practicum as an opportunity to continue their learning by doing, reading, thinking and reflecting, they were caught between pleasing their associate teachers by doing what they asked and meeting the visiting lecturers' expectations when they came to watch them teach. Often their experience was boiled down into 3 words, "Did I pass?"

I smiled at Constance. "Did you want to see me?"

Vignette 2: Alan

I remember going to meet and observe a student teacher on practicum. Typically, I would meet with the student teacher and their associate teacher prior to the lesson to discuss how the practicum was going. On this day, as I walked into the office, I noticed that the situation felt different. Sarah, the student teacher, was looking a little anxious and Malcolm, her associate teacher, gave me a curious smile. He looked at Sarah and said, "Are you going to ask him?"

"Ask me what?" I questioned.

Sarah looked embarrassed and said, "He wants me to ask you to teach the class instead of me."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because this is a hard class and he wants to see how you would teach it," Sarah said.

"That's not really the reason I am here," I said, "and I am not sure how that would help your teaching."

As I reeled to find a better answer, realizing that my first response wasn't that convincing, Malcolm laughed and said, "See, I knew he would not." Looking at Sarah he added, "The key

thing is that you learn to manage a class. They cannot teach you that at the University. In fact, I doubt if he could handle the class you are about to teach. He has not taught a real class in years." Then, looking at me, he said, "After all, this is the real world of teaching."

Much to my relief there was knock at the door and a student gave Malcolm a note. After reading it he glanced at Sarah and said, "See, here's the real world in action. Jackson's got another bloody nose in his class and I have to go take the kid up to the sick bay. Be back in 10 min." And with that he left and Sarah led me down to where she was going to teach.

We discussed the assumptions that reading these vignettes surfaced for us. One of the most telling assumptions in Lynn's vignette, which we had all held to be valid, was that student teachers on practicum will continue their learning journey, building on our coursework and making sense of their experiences even while they are experiencing them. We minimized the problem of enactment that our student teachers grapple with on practicum. Furthermore, we assumed that associate teachers, visiting lecturers, teacher educators and academics would all be working in concert to ensure that the transitions between university and schools was smooth and that the learning in both contexts was coherent. Realizing that this is not the case has spurred us all on to make explicit to our associate teachers what we know are the fundamentals of good teacher education practices. We need to deliberately break down the components of teaching and provide scaffolded experiences for student teachers to learn about teaching in stages, along with providing opportunities for them to explore what they are learning through discussion and reflection. We agreed that our course design needs to give students an opportunity, at the beginning of the course, to go into the school where they will be placed. Associate teachers need much more detailed information about what student teachers have learned in coursework, and therefore what they can expect from them, prior to student teachers beginning to practice in their classrooms.

We discussed ways in which we work to disabuse student teachers of the notion that practicum is a standalone event that can be judged as "passed" or "failed." Further to this, we all reiterate that practicum is a site where they can test some of their own assumptions about teaching. We encourage them to adopt different teaching personas to see which sit most comfortably. We recognize that there will be varying quality of experiences between schools, associates, departments, and classes but caution them against being judgmental. We advise them to fit in with each of their associate teachers and to take the good and bad experiences as learning opportunities.

The tensions that arise for student teachers as they straddle the university and school contexts was reinforced in Alan's vignette. Alan added some further detail about the student teacher he had based his vignette on in our discussions. Sarah had told him, in confidence, that she was embarrassed when conversations like this arose with her associate teacher. As a student teacher she could not

argue back, even if she had completely disagreed with him. She could not afford to annoy her associate teacher since he would write her practicum report and possibly be her referee for future jobs. Sarah also valued being on practicum and being part of the department. She felt she learnt so much on practicum and the more time she spent in a school, the more she knew that this was what she wanted to do. However, at the same time she also enjoyed being a student in her university course. She enjoyed the ideas Alan presented and discussed. The information he taught was backed up by research and resonated strongly with what she thought about teaching. Many of the teachers she observed were doing things that she could see were ineffective or outdated. She felt she learnt a lot by observing these teachers and promising herself that she would not turn out like them. But at the same time, she felt frustrated that she could not observe the content covered at the University in practice. She said Alan tended to work too often in the ideal and she wanted an opportunity to see the ideas being used in a school.

Alan's vignette, and the further detail he provided in discussion, highlighted our prescriptive assumption that the numerous people supporting Sarah's journey to become a teacher were aligned. Akin to those surfaced in Lynn's vignette, we assumed that we each appreciated one another's expertise and the specialist knowledge that we had in our specific contexts.

The two vignettes and ensuing discussion raised many questions for us about teacher education practices and the intersection between university and practicum and we asked, which is the most relevant, authentic, real, or even best site for learning about teaching? Can a student learn to teach without practicum? Can they learn to teach without a university course? Our assumption hunting led us to state that both were important. Neither could stand alone. The problem of enactment (Darling-Hammond, 2006) was clearly an issue foregrounded in both vignettes. Enactment is about how students relate the content learnt in university to their professional decision-making in a classroom setting. This is also commonly known as the theory-practice gap or theory-practice divide. Framed in this way, it is argued that student teachers learn generalized knowledge and principles in the university setting only to find it has little relevance when they encounter the localized and specific problems of the school setting. One aspect of the problem of enactment is when student teachers' broad and idealized concepts, learnt in the university setting, contrast strongly with the experience of being a beginning teacher in the high-pressure and complex setting of the school (Correa et al., 2015; Ovens et al., 2016).

An alternative way of framing the problem of enactment, one that draws from a complexity world view, is to see the problem as a theory-theory gap. In other words, it recognizes that universities and schools are different discourse communities that produce professional knowledge differently. Student teachers move from the university, where 'theory' about teaching is produced through an epistemology of research, to the school where 'theory' about teaching is

produced through an epistemology of practice. University researchers tend to see teaching as a complicated system governed by predictable and stable laws. They have tried to generalize and look for lists those teachers can apply. By contrast, teachers tend to see teaching as a complex system that is unpredictable and dynamic. They generate local theories based on their experience of ‘what works.’ Framed in this way, the problem of enactment is more about the struggle that student teachers have in seeing the relevance of the knowledge learnt in the university setting to solving the complex problems they encounter when in the school setting. The complicated theories suggested by researchers, that there are rules for teachers to follow and apply, do not fit in a classroom because it is a complex system which is uncertain and emergent. Many factors combine and work together to shape the performance of teaching practice. These performances within the classroom and school environment are a subconscious negotiation with, and navigation of, the various elements they encounter in their immediate teaching environment. For a student teacher, many of these negotiations may be masked or made invisible by the associate teacher. This is also indicative of what Darling-Hammond referred to as the problem of observation. For a student teacher to see themselves as a *bona fide* teacher through the filter of their own thousands of hours of schooling, is challenging.

The next two vignettes illustrate an attempt to make the challenges of being a teacher explicit. To make the complex nature of teaching real to their students, both Dawn and Robyn used safe to fail experiments (Snowden and Boone, 2007) and role modelling to simulate what may happen in the classroom or interview situation.

Modelling practice

Vignette 3: Dawn

I want to tell you about a session that went pear-shaped on me. I thought I would model the importance of establishing a positive class atmosphere by modelling being a grumpy teacher.

I had asked half of the class to sit around the outside of the room and to see if they could identify who had been given a special role to play. The other half of the class were lined up outside. I handed them folded slips of paper. Most had nothing written on them, but others had specific roles, for example “Be off-task,” “Be the class clown,” “Be late arriving.”

The session was a mock science practical which included chopping up blocks of agar. The “students” came into class and quickly fell into their roles. Several minutes late, Jing sauntered into the classroom. “Aha, my late-comer,” I thought to myself. Jing was a quiet Asian student who did not contribute in class under normal circumstances.

“This class started 5 min ago” I said scathingly. “You’re always late. What’s your excuse today? Oh, do not bother – sit down.”

He slumped into his chair, and I continued with the session. Minutes later Tama, one of only 2 Māori students in the class, threw a piece of agar which hit Jing.

“Tama! We do not throw things in this room” I said piercing him with my best teacher’s stare. (Good - my class clown had outed himself, I just had to find the student off-task.)

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Jing stand up and start moving towards Tama. He had the knife he had been using to cut agar cubes in his hand. Tama leapt out of his seat and the pair of them faced off in the middle of the classroom. I could barely believe what was unfolding. The tension was palpable. How had it escalated so quickly?

“Get back to your seats” I demanded as I stepped forward into the space between them. For a moment Jing looked at me as though he was considering alternative options. I was honestly relieved when he turned towards his chair. Shortly after, I decided it was as good a time as any to stop the role play and debrief.

Vignette 4: Robyn

The final semester of a teaching degree heralds many opportunities for the new graduate and as preparation, a key element of the tutorial sessions and activities focuses on the “interview.” I decided a role play was in order whereby students would be randomly chosen—name out of container—to act out roles including interviewer/panel roles and graduate interviewee.

I sensed that some of the class felt uncomfortable with the possibility that they may be chosen, so I also explained that it was ultimately their choice whether they participated, and that they could decline and pass. (I felt as though all bases had been covered as students need to feel safe in a learning environment).

The first interviewee left the room, and we redefined our roles and the importance of providing him with positive and constructive feedback. The group relaxed and embraced the role-play. Two more interviews were conducted and the responses and the interactions clearly fore-grounded individuality. The final selection was Shannon. I saw that she looked quite uncomfortable. Sitting in the very back seat in the classroom, she stretched back over her chair, leant right back, her face blushed ...

Shannon: Do I have to?

Me: No, it’s your choice Shannon (Class encouragement ... Go on Shannon).

Shannon: Okay (at this point, I felt that she had reservations and she strolled past me to the door and let herself out, waiting to be invited in for her mock interview).

I walked to the door to welcome Shannon, and she was not there. I looked further along the corridor, and she had her back turned and her head in her hands. Visibly upset. I went to her and asked, "Are you okay?" "I just need a minute" and she walked away. I returned to the classroom and continued with "Shannon just needs a minute ... do we have a volunteer to be the next interviewee?" I did not continue the random selection as reflecting 'in the moment' I did not want another student to feel how Shannon felt.

In both vignettes the assumption Robyn and Dawn made was that experiential learning is a valuable way for students to appreciate the complexities of teaching. What neither had really thought about, prior to their role playing, was how that would feel for them, as teacher educators, when they were made vulnerable in the teaching role. Despite wanting to give students confidence by suggesting they follow standard recipes or guidelines, school students rarely respond to teachers' actions in similar ways, from 1 day to the next, from one student to the next. As the student teachers had demonstrated, they were apt to respond to situations in ways that neither Robyn nor Dawn could have predicted. Furthermore, their responses left both teacher educators floundering for an appropriate way to salvage a learning opportunity from the situations.

In Dawn's debriefing of the session, she had asked Tama and Jing what it felt like for them to be in role. Tama said that he has often been in trouble with teachers at school. He had been disruptive and attention seeking. He laughingly said that he had found it very easy to slip into that role again. In our discussions we noted with a modicum of alarm that we were not surprised that a student who would have identified himself as an indigenous person might have filled this role as a student in any of our classes. Jing's response had also surprised Dawn when she talked to him after the class. She had been genuinely concerned for Jing because he had seemed so upset by her criticism and his anger had seemed very real. As she found out, Jing had loved drama and acting at school. He had relished the opportunity to perform in the class. She was mistaken thinking he had focused on STEM subjects – those typically portrayed as being the subjects of choice for English-as-second-language students. We have all recognized the ways in which we unconsciously pigeon-hole students in our classes. These are assumptions that need to be constantly challenged.

In Robyn's retelling of her experience, she wondered whether Shannon had felt pressured to act out a role in front of her peers. Was there something that had transpired that Robyn had not been aware of that had prompted Shannon's reaction and tears? Had Robyn not prepared the class well enough? When Robyn caught up with Shannon after the session, she asked her what had happened. Shannon did not really understand herself – she had been fine walking out of the classroom, but she just could not face coming back in. It highlighted again, for all of us, that students react and interact in complex ways. Adding role playing increased the complexity to a point where it tipped into chaos.

Underpinning both Dawn's and Robyn's discomfort in the situations was the assumption that teaching about teaching was more complex and problematic than they had admitted to themselves and their students. Robyn had presumed that the opportunity to practice interviews with their peers was a safe approximation of the real thing and a valuable learning experience for all involved. It was an opportunity for her students to put themselves into the position of looking for employment by being able to articulate a considered teaching philosophy. Dawn was using a small-scale, safe-to-fail experiment to probe the issue of behavior management in a way that created space for patterns of behavior to emerge and be responded to in the moment. She was modelling that a teacher's practice must be responsive and adapt to teaching and learning as it unfolds in a complex and dynamic teaching situation. The feelings of unease that we generated through modelling practices, left Dawn and Robyn feeling vulnerable. They did not handle their discomfort to maximize the learning opportunities they had inadvertently created. Their unwillingness or inability to stand before their students and expose their own feelings of inadequacy had been an opportunity to problematize how complex teaching is. The rationale for adopting this non-linear strategy was that student teachers, after years of observing their own teachers, believe that teaching is simple and straightforward or complicated and difficult, but rarely do they appreciate it as complex and emergent (Garbett, 2019). This is explained very briefly in the next section.

Teaching and learning as simple, complicated and/or complex

The complexity of education is difficult to grasp and conceptualize while simultaneously being something that needs to be managed and acknowledged (Ovens, 2017). If student teachers see their classrooms as a *simple system*, teaching and learning are conceptualized as a straightforward cause and effect relationship. In the same way that following a recipe results in the same finished product, students can be lulled into thinking that following a lesson plan will result in learning.

Framing teaching as complicated is more realistic than overly simplifying it. In a *complicated system*, many more elements are interacting and involved in the overall behavior of the system than in a simple system. However, the relationship between input and output, while not self-evident, is stable, predictable and can be established through analysis. Teaching is essentially knowable and controllable. This assumption has led to confidence in a set of "best practices" that a teacher can learn and replicate in their own teaching. This idea is reinforced by setting standards, competencies and effectiveness measures that teacher candidates can accrue or "pass" as part of the process of learning to teach. When students have demonstrated that they can achieve a standard once, repeating it in any other context should be possible.

In a *complex system*, there are multiple elements in play but they are connected and reconnected in non-linear ways. Cause and effect are only comprehensible retrospectively. There are no single

right answers, only emergent behaviors which become apparent through the interactions of the agents in the system when it is perturbed. In complex systems, outcomes are unpredictable and there is no guarantee that, given the same stimulus, the system will respond in the same way each time. This means that what is successful with one group of students may not translate as success with another group of students or even with the same students at some later point.

Conclusion

The analysis of our assumptions reflected in the vignettes revealed that we share a common paradigmatic assumption that researching practice in teacher education is a powerful and effective way to advance pedagogical knowledge and practice. A further paradigmatic assumption indicates that for each of us, inquiry is a defining feature of professional practice. Clarke and Erickson (2004) suggested that if you cease to be inquisitive about your practice, then your practice ceases to be professional. This is a paradigmatic assumption which has underpinned our work as experienced teacher educators who have always researched their practice to improve it. It was interesting for us to note that we had not previously articulated these two paradigmatic assumptions but, having done so, we also now acknowledge that not all teacher educators operate in this manner. Further to these paradigmatic assumptions, we each identified prescriptive assumptions that underpinned our practice, i.e., assumptions about what we thought ought to be happening in a particular situation.

There are several key outcomes from the examination of our assumptions surfaced through the discussion of our vignettes. We have identified that as lifelong learners we need to continue to problematize our teaching; continually inquire and interrogate practice and grasp the teachable moments. Given that this can often be a potentially uncomfortable and disconcerting process, there is a need for a supportive and collaborative community who share a common understanding of the risks, messiness, and contextualized nature of practice. This is where our collaborative Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) community becomes essential in our quest to understand and improve our practice as teachers and teacher educators.

Another key outcome is that assumption definition, identification, and examination are powerful reflective tools. This study supports Brookfield's (2011) suggestion that "assumptions are rarely right or wrong – they are contextually appropriate" (p. 22). The analysis of our assumptions reflected in the vignettes revealed that we do share a paradigmatic assumption related to researching practice in teacher education, that is that inquiry is a defining feature of professional practice.

The third outcome is our recognition that there is an intention to shorten the distance between us and our students. The distance between us, with our experiences of teaching and learning, and our students, when they enter our teacher education programs, is vast. A key practice is to continue to problematize our pedagogical

practices with those we are teaching about teaching. We remain mindful of the perceived and often enacted dynamic that our expertise translates across contexts and that we somehow know the "secret" of teaching well. In reality, we would serve our purposes better if we admitted that teaching about teaching is more complex than telling about teaching. To be a teacher is to do our best to maximize students' learning experiences in messy, complex situations. Sometimes our best is good enough if we admit to our own concerns, frustrations, and challenges of being a teacher.

The examination of our assumptions was a deliberate attempt to disturb, destabilize and deeply question our beliefs and practices and the alignment between what we thought we were doing and what we were doing in our practice as teacher educators. Unlike the Emperor and his new clothes, we have been deliberate in making our teaching and learning as educators transparent. Assumption identification and examination has ensured that what we report in this article are not illusions or delusions but our honest portrayal of the importance of being teachers.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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