

**The sum is greater than the parts:  
Understanding teacher educators' epistemological shifts  
through dual (interpretive and post-structural) meta-  
analyses**

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## **Abstract**

This paper describes how meta-ethnography was used to provide an in-depth analysis across a range of research projects undertaken in a particular study relating to teacher educators' shifting understandings of knowledge and learning. This research was undertaken in the context of teacher education at the University of Canterbury, Aotearoa/New Zealand. A unique part of the meta-ethnography was the use of dual analyses, from two different theoretical perspectives; specifically, from interpretive and post-structural positions. The interpretive analysis was concerned with making sense of how the participating teacher educators made sense of their lived experiences, focusing on teacher educators' narratives of issues raised in shifting conceptualisations of knowledge and learning. The post-structural analysis was focused on situating the teacher educators' experiences within broader social and discursive contexts. Particular emphasis was placed on power relations in knowledge production and how participating teacher educators used the project strategically as a way to re-signify discursive understandings of knowing and learning.

It is contended that the use of dual analyses enriched the meta-ethnography so that the sum was greater than the parts. The complementary insights and more nuanced findings provided by dual theoretical analyses enabled the researchers to engage more fully with the complexities of understanding teacher educators' epistemological shifts.

**Keywords:** teacher education, meta-ethnography, complementary theories and methods

## **Introduction**

Meta analyses in research can take a variety of forms, but they have in common the aim of somehow synthesising findings or ideas across a range of research projects. This can present challenges for qualitative researchers, who are potentially dealing with research that utilises a range of methodologies, that takes place in a range of settings, and varies in scope and scale. In this paper, we describe a particular approach that we took to meta analysis within a multi-layered, qualitative research project, investigating teacher educators' 'shifting' epistemological understandings. We adopted meta-ethnography as our approach to meta synthesis but, unique to the project, we also undertook dual analyses from different theoretical perspectives (interpretive and post-structural) within the meta-ethnography. We explore how, in the context of this particular research project, undertaking dual analyses provided a deeper understanding of teacher educators' epistemological shifts, and of their understandings of these, than would have been the case if we had analysed findings from only one theoretical perspective.

### **Background: The research project**

The meta-ethnography was developed as part of a multi-dimensional, multi-level, collaborative research project that was undertaken by a group of New Zealand teacher educators at the University of Canterbury College of Education (See Abbiss & Quinlivan, 2012; Andreotti, Abbiss & Quinlivan, 2012). The project was aimed at reconceptualising understandings of knowledge and learning and exploring what it means to "shift" conceptual understandings; to develop and implement initiatives in different teacher education and curriculum contexts that encouraged shifts in student teachers' and teachers' epistemological understandings and changes in teaching and learning practices; and to undertake practitioner inquiries related to those initiatives.

Theoretical arguments that underpinned the project relate to societal changes in knowledge societies and to postmodernity, which emphasise a need for reconceptualising understandings of knowledge and learning in educational policies

and practices in contemporary twenty-first century societies. It has been argued that the needs of learners in post-industrial 21<sup>st</sup> century 'knowledge societies' are different to those in 20<sup>th</sup> century, industrial societies. To better meet the needs of learners of the future, schooling systems and teaching practices need to change to accommodate these shifts (see, for example, Andreotti & Souza, 2008; Gilbert, 2005; Hargreaves, 2003), and the transformation of educational practices requires educators to reconceptualise understandings of knowledge and learning (Andreotti, 2010). A multi-dimensional view of knowledge societies was adopted that goes beyond technologically deterministic views of social and economic development and a reified view that knowledge societies are based on technological breakthroughs. Within this theoretical framework, education and curriculum are given central importance as means of encouraging critical thinking and working towards building socially just knowledge societies (UNESCO, 2005).

The research project took place over three years, from 2009 to 2011. At one level of the research, a group of teacher educators undertook practitioner research relating to their work with beginning teachers in initial teacher education programmes and with practicing teachers and leaders in schools as part of teacher professional learning initiatives. The participating teacher educators (practitioner researchers) explored possibilities for thinking differently inherent in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) document (Ministry of Education, 2007) and the implications of these theoretical explorations for changes in teaching and learning practices in schools and the preparation and professional learning of teachers in particular professional contexts. These explorations resulted in a collection of eight published case studies, each describing the conceptual explorations and reflections on the practices of the participating teacher educators (Andreotti & Fa'aofoi, 2012; Ayrton, 2012; Bruce, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2012; Freeth, 2012; Fry, 2012; Major, 2012; Moore, 2012). Seven of the eight case studies also included empirical research relating to practice initiatives undertaken by the practitioner researchers in their work with initial and practicing teachers or school leaders. These case studies provided the data that was synthesised for the meta-ethnography written by two of the lead investigators in the project, who are the authors of this paper.

## **Methodology of meta-ethnography**

Meta-ethnography is a form of qualitative meta-synthesis that supports a holistic analysis across a range of research that is undertaken in different contexts and which utilises different methodologies (Doyle, 2010). The aims of meta-ethnography differ from those of traditional, positivist meta-analysis, which seeks to provide statistical inferences and to generalise across large bodies of quantitative research (Doyle, 2010; Savin-Baden, McFarland and Savin-Baden, 2011; Weed, 2008). Grounded in qualitative and interpretivist traditions, meta-ethnography utilises interpretations of data as the material for comparison in a synthesising process, in order to produce a meta-interpretation. These theoretical traditions recognise that people confer meaning on people, situations and events and that human experience is mediated by interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Snape & Spencer, 2003). The implication for social research is that inquiries relating to human experience need to go beyond observation and attend to acts and ways of interpreting and understanding human experience.

Given the theoretical framework for the research project and the varied nature of the contributing case studies, meta-ethnography was identified by us as an appropriate synthesis methodology for the project. With its interpretivist theoretical underpinnings, meta-ethnography was understood to provide a way of utilising a range of case study research that was conducted in different teacher education contexts and which adopted a range of methodologies, but which all related in some way to the overarching research questions for the project. Underpinning the meta-ethnography is the philosophical understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing, which reflect the plurality, diversity and social nature of knowledge (Grbich, 2007; Kelly, 2006), and that complementary ways of knowing can provide richer and more in-depth insights and explanations of a phenomenon (Green, Camilli & Elmore, 2006). The intention in undertaking a meta-ethnography as part of this research project was to produce qualitatively trustworthy and credible interpretations of data that could render the complexities of what it means for teacher educators to shift understandings of knowledge and learning.

The use of interpretive and post-structural frameworks, to conduct dual analyses provided a wider range of interpretations within the meta-ethnography. A dual analytical approach was adopted in the meta-ethnography to facilitate differing insights from interpretive and post-structural perspectives and in recognition that the project investigators come from different epistemological and ontological positions which influenced their analyses. It was also seen to contribute to the rigour of the qualitative research by making clear the theoretical perspectives from which the analyses were conducted and by supporting theory/perspective and analyst triangulation, in addition to triangulation of data sources and methods (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Patton, 2001). Patton (2001) describes theory/perspective triangulation as “using multiple perspectives or theories to interpret the data” and analyst triangulation as “using multiple analysts to review findings” (p. 556).

The meta-ethnography addressed the broad research questions for the project:

- 1) How are shifts in conceptualisations of knowledge and learning interpreted within the different knowledge domains of the practitioners (teacher educators)? How do these shifts affect the way the NZC is interpreted and implemented?
- 2) How do shifts in the conceptualisation of knowledge and learning affect student teachers’ and teachers’ interpretations of the New Zealand Curriculum?
- 3) What are the characteristics of effective initiatives for shifting student teachers’ and teachers’ conceptualisations of knowledge and learning?

Undertaking a meta-ethnography from multiple theoretical positions implied different perspectives on these questions. The first step in the meta-ethnography was therefore the re-framing of the research questions from interpretive and post-structural perspectives. Table 1 illustrates how the first of the research questions was reframed from these different perspectives. The dual data analyses were then undertaken in relation to these theoretical framings.

The interpretivist questions focused on the participating educators’ lived experiences. They aimed to make sense of how the participants made sense of their shifting

understandings of knowledge and learning (which are interconnected with understandings of teaching and curriculum). The interpretive analysis focused on practitioner researchers narratives of the issues raised in shifting conceptualisations of knowledge and learning. In contrast, the post-structural questions were framed to address power relations and the politics of knowledge production; specifically, to explore the ways in which both the overall project and the case studies operated as sites of re-signification of the knowledges considered most worth knowing.

Table 1: Questions for the meta-ethnography

Research questions	Interpretivist understanding	Post-structuralist understanding
<p>A</p> <p>How are shifts in conceptualisations of knowledge and learning interpreted within the different knowledge domains of the practitioners (teacher educators) in this research?</p> <p>How do these shifts affect the way the NZC is interpreted and implemented?</p>	<p>What are practitioner-researchers' perceptions and understandings of shifts in conceptualisations of knowledge?</p> <p>What are practitioner researchers' perceptions and understandings of the NZC?</p> <p>What frames of reference (interpretive repertoires) are used to present new interpretations of the NZC?</p>	<p>How do the practitioner researchers engage with the research project strategically in order to re-signify discursive understandings of knowing and learning?</p> <p>What are the ways in which some practitioner researchers' understandings of knowing, learning and 'shifting' are both validated and re-signified over the duration of the study?</p> <p>What are the challenges and possibilities which emerge in the processes of re-signifying discursive understandings of knowledge and learning?</p>

### *Interpretivist analysis*

Interpretivist research is grounded in the ontological understanding that the social world does not exist independent of people's subjective understandings and that these understandings are only accessible through participants' interpretations, which are revealed through their language and actions. Researchers interpret these understandings still further, with the aim of constructing understandings of what people do and why they do it (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Interpretive research and analysis is concerned primarily with people's perceptions and pays attention to people's

interpretive acts of knowing and making sense of the social world (Creswell, 1998; Lather, 2006).

A key idea that was utilised in the interpretive analysis is that of the “interpretive repertoire” (Burr, 1995, drawing on Wetherell and Potter). This notion provides a way of understanding how people construct their accounts of events:

... interpretive repertoires can be seen as a kind of tool-kit of resources for people to use for their own purposes. They represent a consistency in accounts which is not located at the level of the individual speaker .... The functions that these repertoires serve for people are seen as generally enabling them to justify particular versions of events, to excuse or validate their own behaviour, to fend off criticism or otherwise allow them to maintain a credible stance in an interaction. (Burr, 1995, p.116)

Interpretive repertoires are similar to, and may be conflated with, Foucault-influenced discourse analysis, where the analysis focuses on serious speech acts or institutionalised talk and practices, rather than on mundane talk or rules of speech (Burr, 1995; Talja, 1999). Identification of interpretive repertoires involves the identification of collections of metaphors or understandings that people have that lead them to construe events in particular ways. The idea of the interpretive repertoire was used in the meta-ethnography to help make sense of what teacher educators, student teachers and teachers said and of their understandings of knowledge and learning.

### *Post-structural analysis*

Post-structuralism is concerned with situating human experiences within broader social, historical and political discursive contexts (Grbich, 2007). In this project, a particular understanding of post-structuralism was adopted, which highlights negotiations of meaning and power relations, social and historical locatedness, and the choices that frame knowledge construction. A post-structural perspective thus interrogates taken-for-granted/Enlightenment meta-narratives of concepts such as “knowledge” and “learning”, conceptual shifts, and educators as knowers. Rather than seeing these discursive understandings as describing a reality, languages are seen as creating stories about realities, social practices and identities. In a constant state of production and contestation, discursive constructions of knowledge, learning, and



teacher knowing are seen as unstable, contingent, dynamic and socially negotiated (Grbich, 2007).

Within the meta-ethnography and in light of the 'discursive turn' (Popkewitz, 1997; Prasad, 2004), a post-structural reading provided an analysis of the ways in which, the practitioner researchers, teachers and school leaders used the project strategically as a way to re-signify discursive understandings of knowing and learning, in line with their own understandings and with those of the participants in their case studies. It explored the contestable nature of 'knowledge that is worth knowing' and processes of re-signification of curriculum and teaching (Grbich, 2007; Popkewitz, 1997). The aim of the analysis was to account for ways in which, in some cases, the participants' understandings of the meanings of knowing, learning and 'shifting' were re-signified or given different meaning.

In relation to specific methods of text analysis, both the interpretive and post-structural data analyses were thematic in nature. Thematic analysis of qualitative data can be understood as a process that identifies key themes and patterns in the data and that establishes the relevance of concepts by making theoretical connections (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). A range of texts were used in both the interpretive and the post-structural analyses, including the case studies, interviews conducted with participating teacher educators early in early stages of the research project and after the completion of their case studies, and questionnaire data collected by some of the practitioner researchers as part of their individual research projects. The main data sources were the reported case study findings and interviews with participating teacher educators. The data analysis began with a coding process that illuminated concepts pertaining to the broad research questions in the texts. These concepts included "curriculum", "knowledge", "teaching", "learning" and "epistemological shifts". It proceeded with the refining of categories and themes as meaning was sought through interpretivist and post-structural readings. Ideas and themes were then elaborated and further refined through writing processes.

### **The sum is great than the parts**

We contend that the use of dual analyses, from two different theoretical perspectives, enriched the meta-ethnography in order to render more fully the complexities of what it means for teacher educators to shift conceptualisations of knowledge and learning.

Complementary insights and more nuanced findings were derived from analyses undertaken from two theoretical perspectives, as opposed to a single perspective. Dual analyses also gave confidence in, or weight to, particular findings, where similar ideas were highlighted in both the interpretive and post-structural analyses. To explain and illustrate these points, examples are drawn from the analyses relating to the first of the overall research questions, and specifically to the reframed questions, that focused on teacher educators' shifting conceptualisations of knowledge.

### **Complementary insights**

An example of nuanced findings and complementary insights relates to the illumination of tensions experienced by teacher educators as they endeavoured to understand and to reconcile their own changing theoretical understandings of knowledge and learning (epistemological understandings) with their personal practice as teacher educators.

#### *Making sense of 'shifting' epistemological understandings – interpretive reading*

The interpretive analysis accounts for teacher educators understandings of their shifting conceptualisations of knowledge and learning in relation to narratives that were constructed by the teacher educators themselves. This analysis reveals that teacher educators came to understand epistemological shifts, and their experiences of 'shifting', as relating to: on-going development; alignment of theory and practice; learning a language; and personal challenge and transformation.

On-going development relates to a continual process of personal learning, where new understandings are grounded in and reflect both previous and new experiences.

Teacher educators expressed concern that the very idea of "epistemological shifts" is problematic and they challenged notions that there is a linear progression from one cognitive stage to another, seeing this as too simplistic. One [Helen] argued that epistemological shifts are "complicated and messy". Another [Alison] preferred to use

the word “morph” rather than “shift”, because for her the notion of morphing conveyed the idea of a journey and an evolving and emerging understanding of complex ideas relating to knowledge and learning rather than a dramatic movement from one position to another.

The idea of the alignment of theory and practice describes the understandings of participating teacher educators that epistemological shifts involve both developing awareness of assumptions relating to teaching and learning and to changes in teaching practice. Several of the teacher educators implied that more complete shifts took place when their developing theoretical understandings and practice were aligned, although awareness of or sensitisation to new ideas about knowledge and learning was also understood to constitute epistemological shifts.

For several teacher educators, learning a language was an integral part of thinking differently about what constitutes knowledge and curriculum. They explained that developing a language to talk about personal epistemological understandings was central to their being able to think differently about their experiences and about knowledge, teaching, learning and curriculum. Developing a new language facilitated different thinking and understandings. For example, one practitioner researcher [Judy] talked of developing a “whole new language “ and “having the words to be able to articulate” new ideas, particularly in relation to post-critical theory and relational approaches, which opened new ways of understanding relationships with the ‘other’.

Personal challenge and transformation was a recurrent theme in teacher educators’ talk and writing about their shifting, or developing, epistemological understandings. Some were aware of an influence that went beyond their professional work into daily life. Questioning what constitutes knowledge, learning, curriculum and the roles of teacher educators and teachers in schools, was at the same time life changing, difficult and personally unsettling. One teacher educator [Jae] talked of it being “kind of difficult to let go of the control of knowing, you know, that they [student teachers] were reading the right things, and getting the right [correct] ideas” while also indicating that her shifting ideas about knowledge and how teachers might learn about the processes and practices of teaching had affected her life beyond work: “It has impacted on everything

actually ... the way I make decisions, and the way I read the newspaper, and the way I engage with my family ... my family would tell you!" Another teacher educator [Alison] coined the word "wobblifying" to describe the unsettling nature of her experience and the challenges presented to her in relation to her thinking and her practice as a teacher educator. She used the word "wobblifying" to describe how her shifting epistemological understandings had given her the wobbles in relation to her personal and professional identity. These personal challenges and transformations are understood by the teacher educators to be closely tied to their identities and sense of self; that is, the challenges related not just to what they do as teachers, but also to who they are as teachers and as members of society.

Through the interpretive analysis, the participating teacher educators are seen to make sense of the personal tensions and challenges they experience in the metaphor (interpretive repertoire) of a journey. Using this metaphor, tension and discomfort are understood as necessary conditions of personal learning and transformation. For example, the interpretive analysis highlighted the following quotes from interviews with different participating teacher educators:

I think there's always a tension, but I think the other thing is that I've realised is that it's always going to be a work in progress ... and that's hard, because I always kind of thought "oh, some day I'll reach a point where I can say 'this is how I should teach, this is what it should be'" ... and I realise now that that's never going to happen. .... I thought I was on a journey to discover the perfect course and the perfect approach. Now I realise that I'm on a never-ending journey of just finding new ways, adjusting and adapting to the contexts and to people. [Jae]

It [discussions with others] affirmed where I was at ... affirmed that it was okay to be in that place, you know, that that was actually part of the journey. [Judy]

I ended up thinking, this journey that the students were taking [in our ITE course], they were not alone, I was with them most of the time! [Amosa]

The journey metaphor is understood to describe a process of ongoing personal growth, development and empowerment. It is presented as a way that teacher educators can put discomforting experiences, which challenge beliefs about who teacher educators are

and what they do, into a positive context as a necessary, expected and desirable part of personal development. It becomes a mechanism by which teacher educators are able to rationalise potentially difficult experiences in positive terms.

*Making sense of 'shifting' epistemological understandings – post-structural reading*

As in the interpretive analysis, the post-structural analysis identified tensions that were experienced by teacher educators as they negotiated their shifting epistemological understandings and the implications of these shifts for their practice. Both analyses highlighted challenges these shifts presented in relation to people's sense of who they were as people and as teacher educators. However, in contrast to the interpretive analysis, the post-structural analysis focused on the multiple, fluid and interwoven nature of teacher educators' knowing and being, the re-signification of their roles as knowers, and the politics of knowledge.

This analysis highlighted the transformation of the practitioner researchers, in relation their identities as teacher educators and as researchers. It is argued through the post-structural analysis that the eight practitioner researchers strategically engaged in the project in line with their existing and emergent interests and philosophies; that their epistemological shifts were intertwined with the nature of their knowing and being; and that epistemological shifts involved the re-signification of the roles of teacher educators as knowers.

For example, several participating teacher educators are seen to engage with the intentions of the project because it validated ways of knowing which resonated powerfully with their personal and professional lives, and which they felt were marginalised in the schooling system. The two teacher educators who worked in the areas of dance and visual arts education are described as having used their case study research as an opportunity to re-signify subjected knowledges. Participating in the project validated their commitments to the arts as a knowledge domain, and their respective identities as a dancer and as a visual artist. Their case studies provided a venue within which they could re-signify what they saw to be the subjugated knowledges of the visual arts and dance, as forms of embodied knowledge and as

legitimate and valued ways of knowing. This is exemplified in the comments of the dance educator:

I was looking to see the sorts of dance teaching that would most expand children's consciousness and learning, So, the practices that I shared with them were what I believed could enhance children's learning ... Movement exploration through the body ... where there was a different way of feeling and knowing and being which can happen through dance. Some people might say it's call "flow" ... I believe in dance, and we have a very holistic way of mind, body, and spirit coming together. [Kerri]

Drawing on literature relating to teacher identity (including Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Connelly, Clandinin & He, 1997), the life experiences and biographies of the practitioner researchers are highlighted for the insights that they provide into teacher educators' deeply held personal and professional identities, beliefs and values. The life experiences of one participating teacher educator [Amosa], who is Tokelauan and who immigrated as a child to Aotearoa New Zealand in order to get a high school education, inform and shape his strong commitment to addressing social inequalities for Pasifika and Māori students and their families:

... some of what I talk about and believe in is really what life has taught me ... that there are parents working at night, who never catch up, or talk school ... And I knew that some parents were struggling with drugs with their kids ... I walk into a classroom full of students [student teachers], and ... I think "one day some of you will come across some out of these world experiences to do with education. Are you going to be able to cope with those changes?" Because most of the time I couldn't. [Amosa]

This teacher educator's beliefs and life experience shape his engagement in the project and inform and frame the case study research that he undertook with student teachers, which was focused on engaging with racial and cultural difference.

The post-structural analysis argues that, given the deep connection between epistemologies and ontologies, it is understandable that being exposed to differing conceptualisations of knowledge and learning can either validate or challenge how teacher educators' see themselves as knowers, and affect their practices accordingly (drawing on Bendixen & Feucht, 2010; Wetherell, 2008). The process of shifting understandings of knowledge and learning has the potential to unsettle teacher

educators' personal values and beliefs, as well as their professional identities as knowers. This may lead teacher educators to re-signify, or attach new or different meanings, to the roles of teacher educators as knowers.

The post-structural analysis revealed the extent to which being exposed to multiple knowledge paradigms called into question how several of the teacher educators in the study understood themselves as 'knowers' and gave them an opportunity to explore the implications of those ideas for their pedagogical practice. This presented challenges for participants. Several teacher educators found the re-signification of themselves as '(in)expert knowers' challenging in relation to their work with student teachers and school leaders. Tensions emerged in the process of shifting away from the role of 'expert knower' as they began to explore, with student teachers, conceptualisations of knowledge as contingent, contextualised and relative (as presented by Gilbert, 2005). Others spoke of tensions that are created when they as teacher educators experienced shifts in their epistemological understandings that did not 'fit' with the understandings of the teachers or school leaders with whom they worked. Some acknowledged deeply affective responses of loss and grief in being asked to give up what were long-held and deeply rooted beliefs. In the words of one of the teacher educators:

I said to her [project leader] "you were asking me to question my values. Everything in that paper came from here" [points to heart] ... I said to her, "You know, I ended up thinking, this journey that the students were taking, they were not alone. I was with them most of the time! ... Because you were asking me to do exactly the same" [give up deeply held beliefs]. [Amosa]

For teacher educators, shifting conceptualisations of knowledge and learning precipitated affective crises (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003). Acknowledging and engaging with feelings of uncertainty and discomfort as they experience epistemological and ontic shifts and challenges to their sense of 'being' as teacher educators, proved to be an important part of the 'shifting' process .

### **Complementary perspectives**

Complementarity of perspectives in research can be understood to derive from different things. It might, for example, stem from the adoption of very different theoretical

foundations; or it might stem from utilising approaches grounded in similar (but not the same) theoretical perspectives. An example of 'complementarity in difference' might be mixed method research, which is philosophically grounded in pragmatism and which incorporates qualitative and quantitative methods or methodologies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakorri & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2009). In such research, projects are designed to include both qualitative (interpretive) and quantitative (positivist) inquires. In contrast, the adoption of harmonious perspectives might occur when components of research may adopt broadly similar ontological positions, but where different theoretical perspectives are adopted within the broader framework to provide complementary readings or analyses.

We contend that the dual analyses that are the interpretive and post-structural readings undertaken in the meta-ethnography described above provide complementary perspectives in the harmonising sense. They are complementary in the ways in which they provide different but connected perspectives on educators' shifting conceptualisation of knowledge and learning. This harmony stems from the shared subjectivist ontological foundations of the qualitative interpretivist and post-structural readings, whereby the social world is similarly understood to exist in ways which are dependent on people's subjective understandings and to be socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hara, 1995). These readings are different, though, in matters of epistemology; that is, relating to the different ways knowing or coming to understand the experiences of participating teacher educators through different analytical approaches.

Within the interpretivist reading, primacy is given to the construction of narratives based in participants' talk and experiences. A strongly grounded approach was taken to data analysis. This meant working from the talk and experiences of the participants to distil factors *of interest and concern to the participants*, privileging the narratives of the participating teacher educators over the writings of others and endeavouring to understand the teacher educators' experiences in their own terms. At the same time, it is recognised this is a re-interpretation of the teacher educators' personal narratives.



This notion of re-interpretation of others' experiences is central to interpretivist research (Creswell, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 1998).

Within the post-structural reading, theoretical understandings of re-signification and of power relations in knowledge construction are used to frame the accounts of participants' experiences. The post-structural analysis was more strongly theory-led, focusing particularly on ideas of the 'discursive turn' and 're/signification' (Popkewitz, 1997). It led to an exploration of the politics of knowledge production and the complex negotiations of epistemological and ontological understandings that were experienced by participants in the project.

It is the epistemological differences between the readings that enabled more nuanced and richer understandings and interpretations of teacher educators' experiences to be elucidated in this TLRI study than would have been the case with a single reading. Together, the different but connected analytical approaches and resulting readings give confidence that the findings of the study are grounded in the data, while at the same time offering theoretically informed understandings of teacher educators' complex, contingent and sometimes conflicting experiences and understandings of knowledge and learning.

### **Final observations**

Conducting dual analyses and providing two 'readings' from different theoretical perspectives was an innovative aspect of the research project. While the idea of using multiple analyses and multiple theoretical frameworks in research is not original, a perusal of educational research literature shows that most empirical educational research looks at data from a single theoretical perspective, which may or may not be made explicit to readers. We were interested in exploring the potential of complementary theoretical understandings, applied within the same project, to synthesise ideas from the same contributing case studies. We found that undertaking dual analyses within a meta-ethnography meant that the resulting synthesis of ideas was deeper and more nuanced than would have been achieved from a single theoretical perspective. Also, that the findings that were gleaned from one of the analyses and were

grounded in a particular theoretical perspective might reveal limitations (and strengths) in the findings derived from the other perspective.

In some research, particularly that which is grounded in objectivist views of the world, researcher subjectivity is seen as a limitation in research and as something that should be negated. In qualitative research, though, subjectivity is understood to be integral to the human experience, unavoidable, and as something that enhances research (Bogden & Biklin, 2007; Hara, 1995). Within qualitative research, then, there is no need to deny subjectivity in research but it is important to acknowledge the researchers' own interpretive acts (Snape & Spencer, 2003). From the beginning of the production of the meta-ethnography, we sought to be honest about the subjectivity of the meta-ethnography, and of ourselves as the researchers who were involved in its production, by being explicit about the theoretical foundations we adopted for the dual interpretive and post-structural analyses. At the same time, the process by which dual-analyses were undertaken respected the unique positionalities and different perspectives that we as contributing researcher brought to the project. This was consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of the project, which recognised and sought to honour the multiple lived realities of those involved in the project and to value multiple theoretical and ontological perspectives on educational issues.

The use of dual theoretical frameworks provided 'added value' to the meta-ethnography that synthesised meaning across a range of case studies relating to teacher educators' explorations of different ways of conceptualising knowledge and knowing in their curriculum areas and areas of professional practice. This value stemmed from the interrogation of data from different perspectives and the questioning and debate that took place between researchers in relation the meanings attributed to that which was said and observed. We do not mean to suggest that research that takes a particular, single theoretical perspective is necessarily and in comparison weaker or lacking in depth. Rather, that the adoption of multiple theoretical positions and the analysis of data from different theoretical frameworks provides *a* (as opposed to *the*) means to enrich explorations of human experiences (in this case of teacher educators'

experience) and to critically engage with rendering the complexities of those experiences more fully.

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### **Tribute**

With great sadness, we pay tribute to Amosa Fa'afoi, a teacher educator at the University of Canterbury and practitioner researcher in the project. Amosa passed away on 26 June 2012. Amosa was much loved by all who knew him for his warmth and generosity of spirit. He is sadly missed.

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