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Teacher educators and the production of bricoleurs: an ethnographic study

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This paper reports and discusses data from an ethnographic study of teacher educators (Hatton, 1990) in which a metaphor for teachers’ work as *bricolage* (Hatton, 1988, 1989) generated a hypothesis about teacher education as a conservative determinant of teachers’ work. The hypothesis was tested during two years of ethnographic fieldwork involving chiefly participant observation and intensive interviewing with nine teacher educators. The paper describes the theory testing approach and presents an explanation of why teachers’ work as bricolage is in need of revision. Four significant revisions needed to improve the theoretical adequacy of the explanation are subsequently presented. The paper concludes with an appeal for further qualitative research in teacher education.

Conceptualizing teachers’ work as *bricolage* directs attention to the conservative role of tertiary-based teacher education in the formation of teachers’ work (Hatton, 1988, 1989). This contrasts with some common assumptions about the relationship between tertiary-based teacher education and teachers’ work. For example, one commonly held position is that the liberal effects of teacher education are erased by various influences in the work situation during practice teaching or at the onset of full-time teaching. See, for example, Hogben and Lawson (1983) on the influence of supervising teachers during teaching practice; Copeland (1979) on the impact of the ecological environment of the classroom; and Hoy and Forsyth (1986) on changes in attitude, from liberal, progressive ones to conservative, custodial ones during practice teaching or full-time teaching. Another assumption is that teacher education has little effect on teachers’ work. Consider, for example, Denscombe (1982) who agrees that teacher preparation can have an influence in some areas, but who argues that the socializing influence of classroom experience over time is so strong that its influence cannot be neutralized in preservice teachers. Thus, teachers’ work, according to Denscombe, is heavily shaped by concerns with control and privacy, since classroom experience “provides a structural limitation to the influence of ideas promoted during training particularly when these ideas have any bearing on control or classroom privacy” (Denscombe, 1982, p. 250). Grant and Sleeter (1985) also direct attention to the influence of prior experiences in school and society, but do not include teacher preparation as a part of the biographical experiences that influence the way teachers shape their work.

There is now, however, a growing group of writers who highlight the conservative effect of tertiary-based teacher education, including Britzman (1986, 1991), Cornbleth (1987), Ginsburg (1988), Popkewitz (1977, 1987), and Zeichner and Liston (1986). The study from which this paper is drawn adds to this literature by demonstrating that, in one specific case at least, the *bricolage* of teachers can be partially explained in terms of multiple shaping influences within teacher education. In what follows, there is a brief account of the broader and more localized context within which data collection was undertaken. Next, the theory-testing methodology used is outlined. Then, the
explanation of why teachers' work is *bricolage*, tested during fieldwork, is described, with particular attention to the factors within teacher education involved in the "mutual simultaneous shaping" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 150) of teachers' work as *bricolage*. Necessary extensions to the explanation of why teachers' work is *bricolage* are next discussed. Finally, an appeal for further research in teacher education is made.

**Context for the study**

This study concerns Australian teacher educators from the former college of advanced education (CAE) sector. Following the Martin Report (1964), from 1973 to 1990 Australia had a binary system of tertiary education. The binary system consisted of universities and colleges of advanced education. A CAE was a tertiary institution fully funded and accredited by the Commonwealth Government to offer programs leading to certain professions and vocations. Many existing institutions, such as teachers' colleges, conservatoriums of music, and so on, became CAEs. While universities were funded for research, CAEs were not. Moreover, CAEs were supposed to offer only undergraduate programs. Over time the distinction between the two sectors blurred. Eventually, the Commonwealth Government created the unified national system of tertiary education in which CAEs became universities in their own right, or were absorbed into existing universities, or were placed under the care of an existing university as a university college.

The study was set on one campus of a large urban multicampus CAE in Australia, immediately prior to the creation of the unified national system. This campus originally opened as a teachers' college in 1969, controlled very directly by the state Department of Education (Barcan, 1984). Because of the legislative change, it became an autonomous CAE in 1973. Its next incarnation, as part of an amalgamated multicampus CAE in 1981, was also relatively short-lived. It was subsequently amalgamated with a neighbouring university in 1990.

The "hand of history" (Lortie, 1975) is significant in understanding the teachers' college/CAE context. The historical relationship between state education departments and teachers' colleges was one in which the teacher training sector stood in a subservient position. State education departments had extensive powers to intrude into the organization and administration of teachers' colleges (Hyams, 1980). The effects of this intrusion were profound:

> Public service regulations deterred public criticism by college principals and staff, while staffing itself was largely determined by the State departments and drawn from within the confines of the respective State teaching services. This had not prevented appointment of staff with high academic qualifications.... Yet however high might be the calibre of a proportion of the staff, it could not offset the major consequences of the control of teacher training by the employing authorities—conservatism and brevity of most training programs, with fragmentation and superficiality as its further results. (Hyams, 1980, p. 252)

Extensive state powers also extended to choice of graduates conjoined with the expectation that the teachers' colleges would produce precisely the numbers and kinds of teachers required by the various state education departments. So, teachers' colleges could not "fail many students" (Barcan, 1984, p. 52). This gave rise to obvious paternalism towards students. Preservice teachers were not encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning; rather lecturers actively assisted students to ensure
that appropriate numbers were able to graduate. Significantly, just prior to this study, preservice teachers on this campus were still complaining that they were not encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning (Armstrong, 1987, p. 10). They complained vociferously that “we’re told what to do, how to do it, when to do it” (Armstrong, 1987, p. 25). They resented what they perceived as the lack of “freedom to fail” (Armstrong, 1987, p. 13).

Most lecturers were recruited from the teaching service and tended to view their placement in Teachers’ College as placements that were “halfway to heaven” (Barcan, 1984, pp. 53–54) compared with their previous positions in schools. Many of the lecturers on the campus in this study became lecturers during this time. Despite the fact that the Teachers’ Colleges were granted autonomy in 1973, the subservient relationship persisted to a large extent; it was simply a “natural attitude” for many of the staff. And since newly appointed lecturers were typically tutored in their role by their experienced colleagues (Barcan, 1979), traditions tended to continue. Control from above, consequently, did not disappear with CAE status. As Nicklin (1989), in an evaluation of the multicampus institution as a potential university, puts it, “Control from above seems to have cascaded through the system” (p. 4). Apart from State Education Departments, control from above came from a variety of sources, including the Commonwealth Government, the Board of Advanced Education, course evaluation committees, and the college council that “has failed to protect the academic body from the tidal wave of interference and control” (Nicklin, 1989, pp. 4–5). It is easy to see why, in a context where the academic body has been governed by “instructing it what do to” (Nicklin, 1989, p. 4), teachers’ colleges have been subservient and lacking in educational goals and purposes (Hatton, 1990). Of course, significant numbers of teacher educators brought this predisposition into the institution with them.

The methodological approach

This study was not based on conventional, naturalistic ethnography that postpones theory and generates grounded theory (Glaser, 1978). Naturalistic ethnographers tend to see research more as a process of exploration than one of theory-testing. They adopt a principle of postponement of theory in the belief that “theory can only, ultimately, demonstrate its own assumptions. What lies outside these assumptions cannot be represented or even acknowledged” (Willis, 1984, p. 89). In order to capture social reality authentically, the naturalist thinks that “it is necessary, certainly in the early stages of research, to receive data in a raw, experimental and relatively untheorised manner” (Willis, 1984, p. 89).

This ethnography is, by contrast, explicitly theoretical; it involves theory testing. It takes seriously the view that the ambition of seeing an object in an atheoretical, interpretation-free way is misguided (see, for example, Delamont, 1992; Willis, 1984). As Angus (1986) said:

Researchers never simply hang around waiting for something to happen. They invariably and inevitably carry so much theoretical (and cultural) baggage inside their heads that what they look at, what they look for, and how they interpret what they “see” can never be totally impartial. (pp. 71–72)

Given this, it is not uncommon to find instances where “the final account of an object says as much about the observer as it does about the object itself. Accounts can be read ‘backwards’ to uncover and explain the consciousness, culture and theoretical
organisation of the observer” (Willis, 1984, p. 90). So, an alternative method rests on recognizing the inevitability of a theoretical, interpretive (including culture and values) component. One response is then “outline and acknowledge the theoretical organization of the starting point” (Willis, 1984, p. 90). And that acknowledgement in this study is that the author’s theoretical perspective was formalized as the metaphor of teachers’ work as *bricolage* (Hatton, 1988, 1989).

However, the research act involves more than a simple matching of theory with data. While the theory provides guidelines for interpretation of data, the data may well point to ways in which the theory is underdeveloped. In other words, the provision of a theoretical perspective does not rule out the possibility of “surprise” or “reaching new knowledge not prefigured in one’s starting paradigm” (Willis, 1984, p. 90). In effect, the relationship between theory and data becomes a dialectic one (Angus, 1986) in which the researcher may be forced to “generate alternative accounts of reality” or at the very least to “question, compromise, negate or force revision in... existing accounts” (Grimshaw, Hobson, & Willis, 1984, p. 74).

The research took place over two years in two phases. Phase one was full participant observation. Phase two combined participant observation with intensive interviewing. Selection of informants took place towards the end of the first phase of the research. In the first phase, the whole campus was the focus of the research, although special attention was directed to the Education Studies Department within which the researcher was located. Ultimately, eight of the nine interviewees came from the Education Studies Department, a department responsible for the teaching of, *inter alia*, compulsory core units in teaching studies, resources and technology, philosophy, and sociology in all preservice programs offered on this campus. (Psychology units were taught in a separate department.) The ninth interviewee came from a group located in the Social Studies Department. The majority were from the Education Studies Department because it was felt that this group was most likely to take a critical, reflective view of the preservice program. Plausibly, members of an Education Studies Department would be teaching, reading, and researching in the area of critical reflection on education institutions, institutional practices, and curriculum. So, members of the Education Studies Department might reasonably be seen as the “cutting edge” of the available teacher educators.

The informant sample was chosen, on the one hand, to approximate the existing staffing profile within the department. Attempts were made to reflect the distribution of age, status, length of employment in teacher education, and gender. On the other hand, choice of participants was also governed by a teaching contribution to the Education Studies Department of five and a half compulsory core units in preservice programs. The total sample included individuals with experience ranging from 4 years to 19 years. Most participants had from 4 to 10 years of experience in teacher education programs. The sample also reflected the oft remarked differences in social class background for male and female entrants to teaching (see, for example, Anderson, Boven, Fensham, & Powell, 1980) and teacher education (see, for example Turney & Wright, 1990). All the males were from working-class backgrounds, while the women came from middle-class professional backgrounds. The relative lack of cultural diversity among the interviewees (only one was a bilingual, non-Anglo Celtic immigrant) is similarly typical of entrants to teaching and teacher education (Logan, Dempster, Chant, & Warry, 1990; Turney & Wright, 1990).

The specific question investigated in the study was: To what extent are teacher educators *bricoleurs*? To answer this question, informant interviewing, involving a fairly
unstructured ethnographic approach was adopted (Spradley, 1979). Rather than utilizing set lists of prepared questions, broad areas were opened up for investigation by means of grand tour questions. The informant’s responses were followed with probes and clarifications. Interviews focused on the biographical experiences of the nine interviewees prior to their becoming teacher educators (including anticipatory socialization for teaching, preservice preparation, early and subsequent years of teaching, and inservice education), their present work, and their visions for change in teacher education. The study investigated the links between the biographical experiences of teacher educators and their present work. However, data presented in this paper do not provide a full, complex account of each interviewee’s perspective (see Grundy & Hatton, 1995 for such an account). Rather, the focus here is on demonstrating the utility and limitations of the bricolage metaphor for understanding the work of teachers.

**Teachers’ work as bricolage**

The chief parallels between what teachers do and what bricoleurs do are conservative work practices, limited creativity, atheoretical approaches to repertoire enlargement, outmoded or inadequate use of explicit theory, deceptive practices of goal achievement, and ad hoc problem solving in the work situation (see Hatton, 1988, 1989 for detailed accounts of these categories of bricolage). These parallels indicate there are good reasons for counting teachers’ work as bricolage, both on the technical, practical plane and on the speculative, theoretical plane. Teacher’s work as bricolage, though, may be divided into two categories according to consequences. Sometimes bricolage will produce consequences consonant with liberal, progressive goals; other times it will produce conservative outcomes. However, liberal progressive goals largely typify the explicit agenda of various state and territory schools in Australia, and such goals are a benchmark for evaluating teachers’ or teacher educators’ bricolage.

Nonetheless, aspects of many Australian schools and teacher education institutions contribute to the frustration of these liberal progressive goals. For example, Grundy and Hatton (1995) found multiple, largely conservative, ideological discourses informing the work of teacher educators (see, also, Turney & Wright, 1990). While student teachers’ take-up of these discourses shows some variation, conservatism is also a feature of the discourses that inform their understandings of their work (Grundy & Hatton, 1994). Hatton, Munns, and Nicklin Dent (1996) found socially conservative academic outcomes in two of the three case studies of disadvantaged schools. The third school, because of a discipline policy that reinforced implicitly racism and sexism, may have also undermined its efforts to be progressive.

**Teachers’ work as bricolage: an explanation**

Teachers’ work as bricolage is intricately shaped. The contributing shapers are frequently, although not always, outside the immediate workplace. In this paper, greater attention is given to the shaping contribution of teacher education than to teachers’ actual work situations. This emphasis is justified on two grounds. First, while the influence of constraints in teachers’ workplaces are relatively well explored (see, among others, Connell, 1985; Hatton, 1985, 1987; Woods, 1990), teacher education as
a conservative influence is less well explored. Second, teaching should be seen as something other than the straightforward application of scientific principles thwarted by situational constraints. Teaching, from a *bricolage* perspective, has much to do with the formulation of ad hoc responses guided, in many instances, by unsophisticated theory. Take, for example, Woods’s (1990) survival strategies model. This model suggests that survival strategies are context specific. Under ideal conditions, better teacher–pupil ratios, and so on, teaching is more likely to be guided by pedagogic principle. There are, though, some teachers with a reflective orientation to their work and a knowledge base that present circumstances prevents them from using. For these teachers, even minor changes in the work situation may bring significant changes in the form of their work. Such teachers, although a minority, would no doubt have a clear grasp of appropriate goals and appropriate means available to them to achieve their goals.

However, there are ample indications in the literature (see, for example, Hatton, 1992; Hatton et al., 1996; Nicklin Dent & Hatton, 1996) that prior experiences (i.e., anticipatory socialization, dissatisfaction with some preservice courses, and unintended outcomes from some others, for example, teaching studies and practicum) have encouraged teachers to eschew pedagogic knowledge and to adopt a nonreflective orientation to their work. First, there is a significant group of teachers who do not seriously reflect upon ends and means in their work. For these teachers changes working conditions are unlikely to change significantly the form of teachers’ work. For them, strategies formulated on the job have become teaching (Connell, 1985). Second, another significant group of teachers have a clear vision of appropriate goals and recognize that the current means are inappropriate. Unfortunately, this group is generally unable to use theory to develop particular and appropriate pedagogic techniques on the basis of their pedagogic theory. Nonetheless, those concerned to understand why teachers teach as they do typically assume that all teachers fit the first group. For example, Grant and Sleeter (1985, 1987) assume that the failure of most teachers to do other than “business as usual” (Grant & Sleeter, 1985, p. 218), in the absence of certain situational constraints, comes down to their unwillingness to “put out” equally for all children. These authors do not consider that some teachers may be quite unable “to do a better job than most currently do” (Grant & Sleeter, 1987, p. 63) because they fit the first and second groups described above.

In contrast with this naïveté about teachers’ work, naïveté like that of Grant and Sleeter, shapers of teachers’ work within teacher education include: (a) prior experiences in school and society; (b) preservice experiences that unintentionally reinforce nonanalytic, nonreflective orientations; (c) the failure of teacher education to radically challenge preservice teachers’ predispositions; (d) the failure of educational theory and teacher education to offer real help to beginners; and (e) the constrained nature of the work situation, all of which are discussed below.

*Prior experiences in school and society*

Preservice teachers enter teacher education having experienced a set of formative, and often conservative, influences in school and society (see Grant & Sleeter, 1985, 1987; *inter alia*, Liston & Zeichner, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). The tendency of teachers to be drawn from a somewhat narrow and predictable range of personal backgrounds is a cause of concern. These teachers may be fairly comfortable
“functioning in the world as it is” and be less aware of “human diversity and social inequality based on factors such as race, class and gender” (Grant & Sleeter, 1985, pp. 126–127; see also Grant & Secada, 1990).

One of the most important of these formative experiences for teachers is anticipatory socialization for teaching that occurs during the years spent in classroom as pupils. Importantly, this “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975, p. 65) occurs under conditions that ensure that “what students learn about teaching... is intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytical” (Lortie, 1975, p. 62). Further, it seems that these early, unsophisticated learnings about teaching remain intact despite teacher education (see Britzman, 1991, and Lacey, 1977, on the importance of personal history as a socializing influence). These early learnings incline preservice teachers to work as technical or intellectual bricoleurs, limiting preservice teachers’ receptivity to, and use of, abstract theory.

Preservice experiences that unintentionally reinforce nonanalytic, nonreflective orientations

Notable experiences in this category include field experience and courses in the area of teaching studies. Research (e.g., Popkewitz, 1977, 1987; Tabachnick et al., 1980) supports the view that field experience contributes to a “utilitarian teaching perspective” (Zeichner, 1982, p. 3). During practicum there are pressures on preservice teacher’s to view:

The technique of teaching... [as] an end in itself rather than a means towards some specific educational purpose. In fact, the issue of why something is taught, and the possible latent long term effects of a particular classroom action are typically not addressed by students. (Zeichner, 1982, p. 3).

This focus on technique ensures that teaching “is separated from its ethical and political dimensions” (Zeichner, 1982, p. 3). In addition, rarely are field experiences structured to ensure more progressive outcomes (for a notable exception, see Zeichner, 1982; Zeichner & Liston, 1986). Field experience thus tends to reinforce a previously acquired unreflective orientation (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Teaching is pushed in the direction of intellectual bricolage. Abstract theory is likely, as a consequence, to be perceived as having no immediate relevance to the real work of teaching despite any intellectual interest it might spark on campus (Buchmann, 1987). Classroom experience, practical abilities, and pragmatic operational principles are likely to be perceived as most valuable to the teacher (Britzman, 1991). Accordingly, Tinning (1984) suggested that student teachers’ inclination is to adopt strategies that “work”, particularly those modeled by supervising teachers; consequently, their teaching style is governed by pragmatic concerns for efficiency rather than by concerns to help students learn.

The unintended contribution of campus-based courses to student teachers’ unreflective technical orientation toward teaching also needs consideration. Take, for example, courses that aim to equip preservice teachers with a basic repertoire of skills and strategies (questioning, explaining, inductive teaching, grouping, and so on), courses that form part of the rather large survival component of teacher education (Rudduck, 1985). The focus of these courses is procedural, attending to a very narrow and sometimes atheoretical variety of “how to’s.” In their attempt to provide preservice teachers with immediate skills, such courses typically divorce technique from sub-
stantive, theoretical issues relating to teaching, partly because the dominant emphasis is on equipping preservice teachers to reproduce existing practices. The development of a critical, reflective orientation to the work of teaching is considered the concern of other courses, particularly studies in education or foundation courses. Techniques and analytic, reflective thinking are, therefore, effectively separated into different courses. This separation pushes teachers’ work toward technical *bricolage* because practical courses (Britzman, 1986; Lortie, 1975) are the kinds of courses preservice teachers perceive as relevant and desirable components of teacher education (Rudduck, 1985). And because such courses appear particularly relevant to preservice teachers’ needs, they are likely to have the greatest impact on preservice teachers’ orientation. Consequently, alongside field experience, these courses, with their almost exclusive emphasis on technique, may encourage a nonreflective, nonanalytic orientation to the work of teaching.

The failure of teacher education to radically challenge preservice teachers’ predispositions.

Teacher education generally fails to challenge preservice teachers’ predispositions toward teaching as technical or intellectual *bricolage*. This failure manifests itself both in omission and legitimization. Omission occurs where teacher educators fail to confront their unique pedagogical problem. This may be put in the form of a question: “What implications are there for my teaching when my clientele, unlike the clientele of other groups in professional preparation, have had exceptional opportunity to observe members of the occupation at work?” (see Lortie, 1975). Neglecting the effect of preservice teachers’ prior knowledge about teaching on the reception of new knowledge has a high cost; preservice teachers resist, transform, or pick selectively from theory. This neglect increases the likelihood that teachers will be intellectual and practical *bricoleurs* rather than operating reflectively or analytically on the basis of contemporary pedagogic or social theory.

It is not so much that student teacher resistance to theory goes unremarked as that such resistance typically does not produce substantial changes in how theory is presented. This resistance is commonly explained away in the language of deficit theory – they are not bright enough to understand theory – or in the language of readiness – we teach theory too soon (Petty & Hogben, 1980). Omission may also occur through a total neglect of the point that some preservice experiences, notably field experience and courses in teaching skills, may have unintended, conservative outcomes. Moreover, negative outcomes, such as “excessive realism” (Katz, 1974), are often ignored. This condition is one in which “student teachers tend to accept the practices they observe in their field placements as the upper and outer limits of what is possible” (Zeichner, 1982, p. 3). In other words, the very condition that will structurally limit preservice teachers’ openness to more varied strategies (for example, cooperative group work, individualized instruction, and so on) is left unexplored and unchallenged.

Legitimization, the other failure of teacher education to radically challenge preservice teachers’ predispositions, occurs when teacher educators uncritically draw on preservice teachers’ prior knowledge as adequate knowledge about teaching. The lay person’s perspective and the teacher’s professional perspective should be different, but are treated as one by the very people who should demonstrate a capacity to distinguish them. The field supervision mode adopted by teacher educators may also tend to
legitimize preservice teachers’ predispositions towards teaching as practical *bricolage*, especially where the mode adopted is a “technical instrumental” one (Zeichner & Tabachnich, 1982, p. 43) in which the dominant emphasis is on practices and techniques of teaching. Legitimization may also occur through inadequate pedagogic responses by teacher educators. One response is a “watering down” of abstract theory or a reduction of courses to a recipe orientation in order to satisfy student expressed (and teacher educator perceived) need for relevance. There is even reason to believe that many involved in teacher education themselves lack a reflective, scientific, analytical orientation to teaching (Buchmann, 1987; Galton, 1989; Hatton, 1991). Many teacher educators may themselves treat teaching as no more than technical or intellectual *bricolage*. This is no surprise, since the pattern of recruitment, as indicated above, has historically been one which draws heavily on experienced teachers (Turney & Wright, 1990).

*The failure of educational theory and teacher education to offer real help to beginners*

Denscombe (1985) directs attention to a classic case of the failure of educational theory and teacher education to give real help to beginners – namely the issue of classroom control. Despite the fact that “classroom control is a basic part of a teacher’s duties,” Denscombe (1985, p. 41) points out that newcomers do not “receive coaching to anything like the extent that is necessary to ensure their survival in the classroom.” Omissions of this kind also occur in methods courses. Consider the mismatch Raths and Katz (1982) found between the attributes that methods course lecturers believed were essential to enable preservice teachers to become successful teachers and the goals that were actually pursued in their method courses. Or, consider what happens when teacher educators exhort preservice teachers to attend to the needs of particular subsections of their client group (the gifted, slow learners, girls, the culturally different) who are presently seen to be disadvantaged. While some teacher educators may take a practical approach to educating the target group they favor, this practicality rarely extends far enough (see Hatton, 1988).

In addition, the underdeveloped state of theories of teaching simply exacerbates the problem of the lack of real help offered to beginners. Beginning teachers are virtually left to discover their own useful knowledge about teaching. Not surprisingly:

The beliefs, values and norms – that is, the knowledge – that teachers come to have most faith in and use most frequently to guide their instructional behavior are those consistent with predictions that have “worked” in the complex and demanding classroom arena. (Bolster, 1983, p. 197)

And it is this knowledge which is highly resistant to change.

*The constrained nature of the work situation*

In attempts to account for conservative regularities in the form of teachers’ work and, in particular, the pragmatic, atheoretical orientation of teachers to their work, researchers have focused attention on constraints that shape teachers’ work (see, for example, Denscombe, 1982; McNeil, 1986; Woods, 1990; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985). More recently, policy changes, particularly as these relate to the governance of
schools, have brought with them significant intensification of teachers’ work (Hatton, 1994a). While explanations vary somewhat, the general view is that teachers are not free agents able to implement their teaching as they wish (see also Hatton, 1985, 1987).

Summary of theory

Characterizing teachers’ work as *bricolage* directs attention to broader issues, such as structural and cultural limitations on the acquisition of pedagogic knowledge at the preservice level (Britzman, 1986; Buchmann, 1987; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Lortie, 1975; Zeichner, 1981–82). It forces attention toward the very real possibility that many teachers, despite socialization and professional preparation, may not possess any kind of abstract theoretical orientation to teachers’ work. The means at the disposal of most teachers are those they have acquired on the job, and many of these quite obviously will be inappropriate for the realization of transformative goals (Grundy & Hatton, 1994). This characterization also draws attention to the related point that earlier acquisition of “knowledge”, which is used by teachers to explain their world, may, in itself, constitute a structural limitation to the acquisition of more efficient means.

It is also worth pointing out that teachers’ (and, by extension, teacher educators’) *bricolage* is typically a rational, although often limited, response to circumstances. Thus *bricolage* is not a bad thing per se; whether it is bad or not depends on its consequences. Specifically, judgments can be made about its worth in terms of the outcomes it fosters (Hatton, 1988). Moreover, *bricolage* is not an all or nothing phenomenon. Teachers (and teacher educators) may move in and out of the *bricoleur*’s mode as the situation demands. Thus it may be that an appropriate goal for teacher education is to aim for a combination of *bricolage* and critical self-reflection. If critical self-reflection is sociologically informed, it is likely to result in *bricolage* that, at the very least, is consonant with progressive outcomes.

Extending the theory of teachers’ work as *bricolage*

It was theorized that the conditions outlined above, taken together, make it likely that teachers, and perhaps teacher educators, come to behave as technical *bricoleurs* or intellectual *bricoleurs* or some mix of both. The data collected on the biographies and present work of teacher educators supported the theoretical model insofar as there is considerable evidence of *bricolage* in both the past and present work of teacher educators (Hatton, 1990). However, in the process of moving between data and theory, it became obvious that the explanation of teachers’ work as *bricolage* required supplementation in four ways to enhance its explanatory power: (a) selective dipping and *bricolage*; (b) reflective, analytic thinking and the production of intellectual *bricoleurs*; (c) teacher educators’ knowledge bases and the production of *bricoleurs*; and (d) the role of teacher educators’ pessimism in the production of *bricoleurs*.

Selective dipping and *bricolage*

The explanation of why teachers’ work is *bricolage* suggests that preservice teachers reject much of what is offered to them in preservice preparation, accepting only that which is judged to have practical utility. However, the data suggest that there is a sense in which
some student teachers are well advised to dip selectively into what they are offered. For example, Colin was recruited from the workforce straight into teaching at a time of shortage of science teachers. On the basis of his recent experiences as a teacher educator, he argued he was advantaged by not completing any preservice preparation: “I think, had I done teacher education, I would have been sucked into believing that teaching was technical. I would tend to see teaching as a technical skill, a set of technical skills.” He argued:

This institution seems to be one that would encourage the notion of the teacher being an aggregate of technical skills because it presents a view – it develops the skills of teaching from the first year micro skills – the skills of basic questioning, variability and all these little skills, so that by the time you get to the end and you put the jigsaw puzzle together to make a total picture of yourself as a teacher, for many it’s seen, or it’s at risk of being seen, as simply an aggregate of the separate little microskills. The little pieces of the jigsaw puzzle only fit together one way. And that to me is a great shame. That’s not what teaching is at all.

Given this, it is possible to see selective dipping into the offerings of teacher education in a more positive light. However, selective dipping by reflective student teachers may more usually produce bricoleurs of the worst kind if what is rejected is curriculum content and method essential to realizing progressive goals. For example, some reflective student teachers may have a conception of social justice and a desire to act on that conception. This is not likely to be actualized, unless they know what to teach and have appropriate pedagogical skills to ensure that pupils are able to learn from their teaching. Consider the case of Margaret, who attributed her beliefs about teaching and education to growing up and being educated in Tanzania during a time of political change. This involved significant changes in the formerly British schooling system:

And I grew up in my secondary school years being aware of people like Freire who was talking about things like emancipatory pedagogy rather than assimilationist education. I was a product of a system where Tanzania was negating... a colonial system. I mean, I was the product of the first... exam that was set and marked in Tanzania. I was experiencing curriculum that was taught for the first time ever in Tanzania to make sure we understood political history about the political development of [our] situation, our revolution, our development as a nation.

Moreover, Margaret was involved in experiences outside the schooling system that were highly influential. In particular, secondary school students contributed to a drive to reduce a massive illiteracy rate. As a consequence of these experiences in school and society she explained:

I developed a view, a personal view that cannot see education out of a political context. ... I saw its importance, and I saw its capacity for emancipation and liberation through application of Freire’s work, and so I think that’s what education is. It’s a process through which we empower people, with which you change their lives, in which you get on with the business of moving from a situation of poverty to one in which you have some sort of basic rights.

This view was taken into her preservice preparation in Australia, which she described as a “tame toothless tiger” because of its failure to conceive of education in political terms:
I tried to select electives like sociology... where they would see education as a political thing. I found they were doing descriptive stuff – not analytical or theoretical – and we did it in a really tame, let’s not get into controversial matters, manner. The most exciting debate I ever heard in 18 months... was a lecturer promoting the advantages of private education versus state education.... But that was the extent of the controversy that was ever raised about education. There were a whole gamut of areas we could get into that were never actually touched.

While Margaret resisted this conservatism, she also resisted substantial parts of her program. Of most of her preservice preparation, she says, “To be quite honest, I often worry about the fact that I can’t recall too much of it.”

Margaret resented the highly structured nature of her preservice preparation as well as the lack of variety and choice in the subjects. One consequence of this is that Margaret tends to remember, and be influenced by, only those units she chose, such as her major in Aboriginal Education, or those parts of compulsory units where she ‘was allowed to research things that were interesting.’ By contrast, Margaret has little recollection of compulsory units, “The set units in education strands were things that I was just going through to get a job.” Curriculum units were recalled as “nonevents” of which she remarks, “I’ve got no recollection, honestly and truly. They were totally forgettable.”

Margaret’s lack of recall of pedagogy units is almost the same. She notes that she has “vague, vague recollections of teaching pedagogy type units.” It seems Margaret’s dissatisfaction with the intellectual and political content of much of the program made her dismissive of most of it. The net result was that she completed her program with a totally inadequate grasp of content and pedagogy. It was only by chance that she was able to avoid the fate of being a bricoleur without the means to achieve progressive goals. She had a six-month internship in a school where teachers were prepared to assist her with both content and pedagogy. Without this experience, Margaret could easily have begun her career poorly equipped to help the disadvantaged students she most wanted to help. Obviously, there are other preservice teachers like Margaret who resist the conservative pressures of teacher education and fail to acquire the means to achieve their more progressive goals. While well intended, they remain inadequately equipped to help those students most dependent on the school for academic knowledge.

*Reflective, analytic thinking and the production of intellectual bricoleurs*

There is an assumption in the explanation of why teachers’ work is *bricolage* that analytic, reflective thinking is occurring at least in the foundations components of preservice programs. The data on both the biographies and present work of the interviewees indicate, however, that this assumption is dubious. It seems that genuinely hard-headed intellectual endeavor rarely occurs in the preservice programs offered on this campus or perhaps elsewhere in teacher education (Turner & Wright, 1990). This point is illustrated both with biographical data and data on present work.

Despite the variety in the form of the preservice preparation undertaken by the group studied, their preservice experience was quite uniformly held in low esteem. On the whole, they claimed it contributed little to their development as teachers. Perhaps the most striking feature of these teacher educators’ talk about their preservice preparation is their description of it as mere “hoop-jumping” or as simply “going through the motions.” Dale, the youngest of the interviewees, undertook her three years
of preservice preparation for a Diploma of Teaching on the campus where the research was conducted. Her preservice preparation turned out to be, on the whole, a disappointment. She says, “I hated college. I detested college. I did nothing while I was at college. College to me was part time to everything else I did.”

She found formal, scheduled lectures disappointing. The only classes she enjoyed and attended regularly were philosophy and sociology. This was not, however, for the intellectual content but because the classes were structured to allow interaction. Many of her classes did not, and she disliked the passivity forced upon her. She found it unnecessary to attend many of her other scheduled classes. For example, ‘psych’ was a “bit of a nonevent” insofar as:

All we did for psych was get given a textbook, told to learn it, learn what chapters and do multiple choice, multiguess tests on it. And I quite literally never went to psych lectures ’cos all I did was read the chapter the night before and do the test.

The compulsory curriculum units were disliked because they were “low-level stuff.” Allegedly, the major emphasis in these units was mastery of the primary school curriculum with a small “element of how to teach the content.” Dale rejected this on the following grounds: “The primary school curriculum was what I had done by seventh grade. It was stupid.”

The three teaching studies units were also disappointing because of their prescriptive nature. Dale claims that “they tried to give me one recipe, but it didn’t go down.” She elaborated more specifically,

Some of them, I found to be prescriptive in terms of “this is the way to do it” and, sure, you’ve got to have some sort of prescription when you’ve got nothing else, but I don’t think that’s the only way. … For instance, in the teaching studies subjects… it was very structured, extremely structured.

In fact, there was not one aspect of her program which Dale described as intellectually satisfying or challenging.

Similarly, Peter’s depiction of his present work illustrates very clearly the way in which analytic, reflective thinking often fails to occur in the foundations program. Peter teaches philosophy of education. He argues that one of the most significant and important things he does is to provide opportunity for student exposure to different “models” of education:

And I feel it’s just so satisfying to expose students to the idea of – that’s what a traditional school looks like, and this is a fairly progressive one, but that’s radical. And unless you’ve visited that sort of territory and said, “This one’s fairly traditional, mildly traditional, very progressive, mildly progressive, radical and way out,” I really think you’ve got to expose all these possibilities. You could say there’s a sort of continuum there. One of the problems is, if you’re not in the right lecture group, you could go through three years here without getting exposure to more than one of those models.

Indeed, this is one of the changes Peter would have imposed on the program, if it were in his power to do so:

If I had my way… we’d be exposing students… to a range of traditional progressive, radical, and that would involve Baptist, Calathumpian, agnostic, laid back, uptight [and] ACE [Accelerated Christian Education]. I think philosophically you have to explore a whole spectrum.
The means that he uses to achieve this exposure is student collected and presented materials. He remarks:

In my case I take a lot of preservice philosophy classes. I’m very much into my students – well, sometimes they go to get something way out – quite a number of my students visit a hippy commune. They go in with a video recorder and then they come back. They go into the Hare Krishna’s, and they go to [an independent school] to ACE, but they visit a whole wide spectrum of possibilities. An I believe that’s really strong in the sense that they’re not Philistines philosophically, and we’re trying to get them out of their parochial world.

The principal activity he appears to engage in with his preservice teachers is descriptive exposure. He did not engage in critical analysis of any of the “spectrum of possibilities.” Indeed, he praised the virtues of a “very pragmatic approach,” which he contrasted with a more analytic academic one (“I mean there’s an esoteric, very academic kind of philosophy that’s relevant at honors level”). He said:

We’re philosophically examining the issues, and that can embrace such things as multicultural awareness, being sensitive to diverse groups, and religions. … You’ve got more than a fighting chance, if you invite them to use slides, pictures, videotape, guest speakers. The methodology has to be interesting and useful, but if you can do that and you put a big emphasis on participation, you can genuinely feel these students growing. And sometimes the class bigot, you can really feel them growing.  

The overriding goals Peter sets for himself, described variously as “taking [the preservice teachers] thinking a bit further,” “moving them ahead philosophically a bit,” and “extending awareness,” appear to be fairly limited ones. Consider, for example, the following discussion of his hopes for a philosophical treatment of the underprivileged:

There are two ways you can look at the underprivileged. You can simply say, “Oh, look at all those underprivileged people, isn’t that tough luck.” On the other hand, you can really be concerned and empathize and do something about it. I’d expect that the lowest common denominator might well be for a lot of our students being philosophically at least more aware that they are out there [emphasis added]. That’s the lowest. The highest common denominator might well be even perhaps empathizing with them and to some extent doing something about it. Although I don’t know that it’s a fundamental objective. In a 50 minute seminar you can’t be too ambitious. I think I’m really on about extending awareness [emphasis added], but if there’s spillover advantage to people in Kampuchea or Africa, or whatever, that’s great.

Note how the “underprivileged” are treated simply as a topic to be covered in a short time span. This approach seems to distance the “underprivileged” from actual students these preservice teachers might encounter in Australian classrooms. It is apparent that no conscious links to classroom practice are forged. No links are made between teaching and the pursuit of social justice. Moreover, the goal Peter sets for this 50-minute seminar, namely, “students being philosophically aware they [the underprivileged] are out there,” is trivial given media treatment of issues of poverty and famine in Third World Countries in recent years. Perhaps such limited goals enable Peter to be more optimistic than some of his colleagues about positively influencing preservice teachers’ attitudes and values.
The explanation of why teachers’ work is *bricolage* suggests that the theory to which preservice teachers gain access is watered down as a consequence of an inadequate pedagogic response by teacher educators. It does not anticipate that many teacher educators might well have inadequate knowledge bases for the subjects they teach. Consider, in this context, a pattern which emerged in the biographies of the male teacher educators who entered tertiary teaching in Teachers’ Colleges and CAEs in the late 1960s and 1970s. At that time, many staff were generalists with undergraduate degrees in which there was no specialist focus. Some teacher educators used paid study leave to acquire doctoral qualifications and thereby a specialism. However, they do not restrict their teaching to this specialism. As Peter put it, “You name it, I’ve done it … right across the spectrum.” Peter, unlike many of his colleagues, was critical of the generalist strategy in which “good faithful troops … fit into slots all over the place.” He remarked:

> I think there’s been a lot of, for want of a better word, I’ll call it lower level and unidealistic thinking in this place. And I think the place has grown up on the notion that it’s good to be able to lecture in a lot of different subjects, even though you might be just a master of superficiality.

He compared this experience with his transition from primary teaching into secondary teaching: “When I went into secondary, [you] had to take anything that was shoved down your neck. And I did it, and I tried to make a success of it, but it isn’t an ideal.” Most long-standing members of the department, however, consider themselves suitably equipped to teach the full range of Education Studies Department offerings. Moreover, it was taken for granted that new staff members would follow suit.

Margaret, who was in a position to overview the whole program, said her major criticism of the program was “that the kind of knowledge it purveys is technique-based and where the base is broader, all too frequently that broadened base is merely descriptive.” In her view, the lecturers lack the substantive base necessary to work at any other than a descriptive level. She said:

> We have a Social Studies lecturer here who fantasizes about taking students to Papua New Guinea for three weeks to find out how Papua New Guinean villagers live. That’s crap! What about a theoretical base? Why don’t they consider what education is doing in post-independent societies? That at least would widen their knowledge in a more powerful way. Or why haven’t we got at least one compulsory core unit in this preservice course specifically aimed at breaking down the prejudices of mainstream students towards Aboriginal and Islander people? You know we’ve got a fourth world country situation within this country and many of them don’t know or understand why. The way things are, those students are almost inaccessible. They’re the largest group here, and we don’t get a chance, except on an ad hoc basis, to attempt to change their attitudes or give them information to incorporate in their teaching so they, in turn, can help break down some of those prejudices. We have to rely on the lecturers for that, and that’s unlikely to be totally effective. So few really have the kind of information or theoretical base to do that successfully, even if their sympathy is in the right place.

Many teacher educators, thus, appear to have merely a *bricoleur’s* grasp of knowledge, concepts, and issues. The major consequence of this is that preservice teachers’
education is a nonrigorous, nondemanding one that can be treated as a mere hoop to jump through. Moreover, the teacher educators themselves demonstrate considerable anti-intellectualism; certainly they eschew research literature as a basis for programs and proposals. The most revealing display of this tendency arose when teacher educators were given an opportunity to reconceptualize practicum. All submissions were formulated without recourse to the extensive research literature on the practicum – despite the fact that the institution’s library held a significant number of relevant books, reports, research journals, and year-books on research in teaching, teacher education, and the like, to which reference could have been made. The knowledge base utilized for the task was, in all cases, the teacher educators’ experiences (Hatton, 1994b). It was, thus, to “experience” rather than the appropriate research literature that many of the teacher educators in this study turn when they are called upon to conceptualize change – a predisposition teacher educators appear to share with teachers (Hargreaves, 1984). For example, Viv, who was close to retirement, turned back to the one part of his preservice program which he approved and used as the basis for his “reconceptualization”. He updated it only by replacing a demonstration school component with a videoed teaching episode (see Hatton, 1994b, for an extended discussion).6

The role of teacher educators’ pessimism in the production of bricoleurs

The explanation of why teachers’ work is bricolage anticipated a lack of challenge to previously acquired knowledge bases about, and predispositions toward, teaching. However, it did not anticipate that most of these teacher educators would have little faith in the capacity of education to bring about change in attitudes, values, predispositions, and practices. This lack of faith or pessimism acts as a further force for conservatism, since there seems to be little serious endeavour directed at attempting to bringing about change. Moreover, it obviates the need for teacher educators to critically consider the adequacy of their knowledge base, pedagogy, and positions. Again, it needs to be recognized that it is only a minority of teacher educators who are likely to be committed to genuinely progressive change.

For examples, consider the cases of Stephen and Viv. Stephen adopted the view that capacities, inclinations, predispositions, and so on that preservice teachers enter their preparation with are almost end states. The most, he conceded, that you can do is “change a few of them on the way through.” Given this constraint, he simply worked within it. In terms of attitudes and values, he accepted that some preservice teachers “don’t give a stuff.” In terms of practices, he argued “You can pick the ones who are going to be experimental.” He went on to indicate “I can probably pick them in first year, people who are going to be innovative.” Teacher educators simply do not have much impact or impression here because it comes down to an “attitudinal” thing. Stephen asked, “Are you a risk taker or aren’t you?” He, therefore, adopted the view that the most productive path is to accept this state of affairs and work within it:

You can give them some experiences that will confirm a particular way of teaching and getting kids to learn that if they become proficient at and they understand, they will do it... [because] ... they feel comfortable with it. It seems to work for them. They’ve found it works for them.

Viv, by contrast, was relatively optimistic about the possibility of changing or extending the practices or techniques preservice teachers use (see Hatton, 1994b). As for making
an impact on their attitudes and values, Viv claimed the most that is achievable is making them “aware, more aware that there are a lot more things than they’ve thought of before.... You don’t, however, change people’s attitudes.” His idea was that at the time of entry into preservice, “People’s attitudes are pretty well formed; that’s the nature of the beast.” Viv claims there is “nil chance” of combating problems like racism or derogatory attitudes toward any social group.

There are two interesting aspects here. First, the theoretical model Viv employs in his philosophy unit is the social construction of reality framework. This is a framework that suggests social change is possible, yet Viv seems to ignore it. At the very least, it is not seen as having a purchase on everyday problems. Second, the failure to change preservice teachers’ attitudes and values is never conceived of as a problem of knowledge or pedagogy. Rather, the problem is attributed to the preservice teachers. However, as the following example illustrates, Viv has considerable difficulty in handling anecdotal material that preservice teachers draw on to rationalize their racist positions. About racist incidents occurring in class, he says, “And we had the same sort of thing last semester with [respect to] Aboriginals. There was a group of country girls mainly they were talking about. What was it, I think they called it the ‘boong cheque.’” Apparently, these girls had “come from a place where money was tight for a lot of white people” and in which the white population was resentful of what they saw as advantages given to Aboriginal people over whites. Viv’s initial response was to “make it clear that I thought it was a poor attitude.” However, Viv found this encounter difficult, since one of the girls drew on information that Viv wasn’t able to counter:

Her mother owned a pub at Mt. Isa, or somewhere like that, and a lot of the things she was able to say, I wasn’t able to refute. “Oh,” she said, “if you saw drunken Aboriginals all the time, and lazy and dirty, lying in the street, you might feel like that too.”

Assume, as is plausible, that an adequate understanding of the place of Aboriginal people in Australian society would provide the basis for a critical response to the reported anecdote. Assume also that someone teaching sociology of Australian education, as Viv regularly does, ought to have such an understanding. Viv’s “confession” indicates that he has no such understanding or that, if he does, he is unable to do anything with it in a teaching context.

Conclusion

The extended explanation of why teachers’ work is bricolage shows that, in many ways, the beliefs, values, practices, inadequate theorizing, and inadequate knowledge bases of teacher educators may trap their preservice teachers in a culture that is not conducive to liberation “from the unwarranted control of unjustified beliefs, unsupported attitudes, and the paucity of abilities which can prevent that person taking charge of his or her life” (Siegel cited in Zeichner & Liston, 1987, pp. 23–24). This implies an important task for teacher education, namely, to find ways and means to change this state of affairs by redirecting teachers’ bricolage to ensure progressive outcomes.

At the very least, it indicates the importance of ensuring that teacher educators and their teaching are subjected to further research. Grundy and Hatton (1993), for example, point out that “there is a growing realisation that understanding how teacher educators think about and perform their work, how their biographies and ideologies
impact on and shape their work, is important” (p. 7). It may well be that the accumulation of research from such studies will motivate change in teacher education. At the very least, it may provide a useful knowledge base to counter the proposals of those who operate on narrow, technical understandings of teachers’ work.

The most appropriate methodology for the task of detailed exploration of teacher education is qualitative. Both theory testing and grounded theorizing have the potential to generate important insights. In Australia, qualitative studies of teacher educators are rare. Surveys have been the major methodological approach to research on teacher educators. However, the survey approach has consistently left significant areas of teacher educators’ work underexplored. The technology of the survey has not permitted the detailed insights which qualitative research offers. It is time to generate studies to complement and extend the picture revealed by survey.

However, the finding of this study, that teacher educators are themselves bricoleurs who contribute to the production of classroom teachers who are bricoleurs, may not necessarily generalize across all teacher educators. After all, this study was set in a CAE, a form of tertiary education with a very distinctive history, material, and social circumstances. It may well be that programs and teacher educators in the university sector under the binary system were distinctively different from the type of program and teacher educators discussed in this study. Whether or not teacher educators in the unified national system can be said to be bricoleurs engaged in the production of bricoleurs of the worst kind, presenting programs that are characterized by narrow, technicist, atheoretical approaches, remains worthy of further exploration.

Acknowledgment

This paper has benefited from comments by two anonymous referees.

Notes

1. For ethical reasons, references which identify the larger institution or the specific campus appear in the reference list in modified form.
2. Nothing here implies that those who reject liberal, progressive goals are bricoleurs; specifically nothing here implies that those who reject liberal, progressive goals are, from a theoretical point of view, defective or impoverished.
3. This should not be taken to imply that liberal progressive goals should be accepted uncritically. Like any orientation, liberal progressivism is subject to critique; however, it is beyond the scope of this paper to pursue that critique here. Interested readers are referred to Morrison (1989, p. 3) who critiques liberal progressivism as it is conventionally understood, attempts a “fairer reading of its central tenets,” and “couples this with the developing concept of a socially critical school,” which he argues “provides for an emancipatory primary education which embraces critical theory.”
4. As Tabachnick and Zeichner (1985), Goodman (1985), and Grundy and Hatton (1994) indicate, there is no one essential response to multiple simultaneous shapers of teachers’ or teacher educators’ work. However, variety in response should not be taken as automatically ensuring progressive outcomes (see, for example, Grundy & Hatton, 1994).
5. There is considerable irony in this comment. Although often critical of student teachers for bigotry, particular racism, a number of the teacher educators in this study displayed bigotry in various forms themselves. For example, one lecturer was shocked to discover an Anglo-Celtic female student was married to a black person. His response was, “But she’s beautiful.” The clear implication was that only an unattractive Anglo-Celtic woman need take this course of action. Another lecturer said of Aboriginal university students, in a context, where the meaning was clearly derogatory, “And you know what they’re like as students!”
6. It could be argued that pressure of work in the CAE sector was a contributing factor in teacher educators’ failure to read relevant research literature. While it is true that CAE teacher educators had
significant teaching loads (up to an equivalent of 16 hours’ contact was not uncommon), it was also true that the heaviest loads were often carried by casual and contract staff. Typically, senior lecturers and above had lesser loads. Moreover, repetition of classes and team teaching modes significantly reduced preparation time.

7. “Boong” is a derogatory and offensive term applied to Aborigines. The cheque is a social security payment by the Commonwealth Government to unemployed people, single supporting parents, and so on. Talk of a “boong cheque” implies both that more money is available to Aboriginal people and that Aboriginal people are undeserving recipients of these social security benefits.

References


