

**Action Research Built on Uncertain Foundations: The
internship and action-research in a graduate teaching degree**
**Recherche-action élaborée sur des bases incertaines : le stage
et la recherche-action dans les programmes de maîtrise en
enseignement**

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Article abstract

This paper analyses action research's uncertain foundations in graduate teaching degrees. This analysis focuses on one Master of Teaching program in Australia, and is conducted by the program coordinator in partnership with a recent graduate of the program. Uncertainty is traced to the structural incoherence of the program that is created by the influence of disparate philosophies of teacher education. The philosophy and practice of the program is informed by both the *scholar teacher* and *reflective practitioner* models of teacher education. It is argued that these models are incommensurable and lead to a poor use of action research during the internship of the program. The action research would be more authentic if a phronetic model of teacher education underpinned the entire program rather than just the final internship. This phronetic model will remain an ideal because of the prevailing hegemony of neo-liberalism that supports a means-rationality associated with performing to the graduate standards rather than a values-rationality associated with developing a lifelong habit of phronetic practice.

ACTION RESEARCH BUILT ON UNCERTAIN FOUNDATIONS: THE INTERNSHIP AND ACTION-RESEARCH IN A GRADUATE TEACHING DEGREE

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ABSTRACT. This paper analyses action research's uncertain foundations in graduate teaching degrees. This analysis focuses on one Master of Teaching program in Australia, and is conducted by the program coordinator in partnership with a recent graduate of the program. Uncertainty is traced to the structural incoherence of the program that is created by the influence of disparate philosophies of teacher education. The philosophy and practice of the program is informed by both the *scholar teacher* and *reflective practitioner* models of teacher education. It is argued that these models are incommensurable and lead to a poor use of action research during the internship of the program. The action research would be more authentic if a phronetic model of teacher education underpinned the entire program rather than just the final internship. This phronetic model will remain an ideal because of the prevailing hegemony of neo-liberalism that supports a means-rationality associated with performing to the graduate standards rather than a values-rationality associated with developing a lifelong habit of phronetic practice.

RECHERCHE-ACTION ÉLABORÉE SUR DES BASES INCERTAINES: LE STAGE ET LA RECHERCHE-ACTION DANS LES PROGRAMMES DE MAÎTRISE EN ENSEIGNEMENT

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article explore les bases incertaines sur lesquelles repose la recherche-action dans les programmes de maîtrise en enseignement. Il cible son analyse sur un programme de maîtrise en enseignement offert en Australie, analyse pilotée par un coordonnateur du programme et un étudiant récemment gradué de ce programme. L'incertitude trouve son origine dans une incohérence structurelle du programme, incohérence créée par l'influence de diverses philosophies hétéroclites de la formation des enseignants. La philosophie et la mise en pratique du programme s'inspirent à la fois du modèle de l'*enseignant chercheur* et du concept du *praticien réflexif*, approches du domaine de l'éducation. Les auteurs soutiennent que ces modèles sont incommensurables et engendrent une mauvaise utilisation de la recherche-action lors des stages faisant partie du programme. La recherche-action serait plus authentique si un modèle phronétique de la formation des enseignants soutenait le programme dans son ensemble plutôt que seulement le dernier stage. Ce modèle phronétique demeurera un idéal puisque l'hégémonie néo-libérale actuelle préconise une action rationnelle en finalité, associée à l'atteinte de normes de graduation,

plutôt qu'une rationalité spécifique aux valeurs, nécessaire au développement d'habitudes de vie propres à la pratique phronétique.

Action research and pre-service teacher education have a long and interesting history. Action research has served a variety of purposes during this history. Ax, Ponte and Brouwer outline (2008) the different purposes of action research, pivoting on the question on whether it is positioned as a means or/and an end in teacher education. As a means, it is a method whereby pre-service teachers can integrate theory and practice, most commonly in professional experience units. As an end, action research is a disposition or skill that is to be learnt as a lifelong attribute of a teaching professional.

Ax, Ponte and Brouwer (2008) describe teacher education programs that go beyond using action research as a method or a goal and are founded on the principles of action research. These three purposes for action research, as method, as goal and as foundation, outlined by Ax et al. serve as our framework for the discussion in this paper on how action research is employed in our program.

In the program that is the subject of this paper, student teachers complete an action research subject simultaneously with their 9-week internship. The action research is intended to be a capstone experience for these graduate students completing a 2-year program. Unfortunately, the action research capstone is laid on what we regard as being uncertain foundations. From our perspectives as a graduate of the program (Margo) and the program coordinator (Tony) we analyse what we consider to be the structural factors that contribute to this confusion. The main factor identified is the lack of coherence amongst the different elements of the degree program, which is compounded by the late introduction of action research in the final semester. We then move past our own malaise to ask questions about the sustainability of action research as a method, goal or underpinning foundation for teacher education in an age of increased compliance. The increased compliance is enforced through the audit culture of the graduate teacher standards in Australia.

The audit regime in teacher education in Australia has been acting in concert with the narrow scientific orthodoxy of evidence-based practice, which places further restrictions on the ideological territories of teacher education. The evidence-based model is the favoured approach of all political parties in Australia and has received generous government funding for its implementation in one university.

The Graduate School of Education at Melbourne received six million dollars of federal government funding to establish a teacher education program based on a clinical or evidence-based model. The Melbourne Graduate School is

touted on the Teach for Australia website as being “Australia’s best school of education” (Teach For Australia, 2009, par. 2), presumably a claim that might be verified by evidence.

We are not piqued by institutional envy but are more intrigued by the impact that the Melbourne Model might have on the deployment of action research in teacher education. One of the creators of the Melbourne program has publicly outlined her position on action research, stating that she believes it is not a suitable method for pre-service teachers (Ure, 2010). However, some of her fellow travellers on the evidence-based train espouse pedagogies of professional learning that seem very similar to the type of action research that we teach in the Master of Teaching Program. Petty (2009) and Marzano (2003) both encouraged teachers to conduct what they call experiments in order to trial new pedagogies in their classroom. These experiments help teachers to apply scientifically proven pedagogical strategies in their own classrooms. That is not too far away from the model of action research that we use and demonstrates how far we have moved away from phronesis acquired through action research to a practice that is closer to the clinical model advocated by the graduate school in Melbourne.

This paper is a result of a sustained teacher-student / colleague conversation between the authors over a two-year period, a tentative step towards Tony’s phronetic reawakening. Margo is both participant and author in this paper. The paper uses Margo’s narrative reflection of her experiences in the MTeach program to launch an analysis of the position of action research in this program. As such, the narrative is a historical timeline in the evolution of this paper as it was this reflection that prompted Tony and Margo to begin their interrogation of the program. We ask the reader, therefore, to consider the narrative to be the empirical data upon which this study was created.

THE POSITION OF ACTION RESEARCH IN THE MASTER OF TEACHING

In this section of the paper, Tony, as the program coordinator of the Master of Teaching (MTeach) program, presents the philosophical foundations of the program. These foundations are still easily discernible in the program documentation that was created for the establishment of the MTeach degree in 1995.

The Master of Teaching program and its 17-year history is a relative newcomer at this University that has a 100-year-old Bachelor of Education program. Even though there is a large time lapse between the creation of the two, they were both built on similar humanist foundations (Connell, 2009). The differences, according to Connell (2009), lie in the expression of these humanist ideals in the program methodologies and philosophies. Connell argued that the original Bachelor of Education was built on the scholar-teacher model:

this provided a basis for an idea of the good teacher who not only knew how to run a classroom but also learned how to think for herself, apply disciplined knowledge, and act as an agent of cultural renewal. The quality of teaching and the purposes of democracy were linked by a mass humanism, embedded in common-learnings curricula, and translated by a workforce of intellectually autonomous, university-educated teachers. (Connell, 2009, p. 216)

Connell (2009) went on to argue that programs developed later in the 20th century with the same humanist ideas produced the reflective practitioner model. She associates the reflective practitioner model with “the initiatives for school-level democracy and teacher-developed curricula, which became powerful in the 1970s” (p. 216). More pertinently for the focus of this paper, Connell argued that the reflective practitioner approach “focused on how occupational knowledge can be developed in teachers’ practice” (p. 224). In contrast, she argued that the original scholar-teacher model gave a “clear account of Education as a field of knowledge” (p. 224).

Using the Aristotelian categories of knowledge, Connell is making an argument for a model of teacher education based on *episteme* (knowing why) and *techne* (knowing how). The scholar teacher is expected to learn the field of Education in the academy so that they may apply this “disciplined knowledge” to the classroom. The delineation of theory and practice in this model was, and is, reflected in the neat division of labour in the teaching faculty. The professors impart the disciplined knowledge in lectures, tutors try to make this knowledge accessible to students, and professional experience is scheduled at the end of semester when the lecturing is complete. This is the political context in Australia in which the Master of Teaching program was introduced in 1995.

The four-semester graduate Master of Teaching program is based on the reflective practitioner model. Case studies are used as a teaching method within a community of inquiry where students are expected to collaborate. Students move from analysing cases in the first semester to writing their own reflective case stories at the end of the first year. In the second year of the program they build on the reflective case stories to conduct action research on their own practice whilst on their 9-week internship. This progression from case analysis to action research seems to embody the development of occupational knowledge that Connell (2009) identified as being characteristic of the reflective practitioner model.

The reflective practitioner model would be categorized within the Aristotelian frame to be an attempt at creating *phronesis* among student-teachers. *Phronesis* “is a kind of morally pervaded practical wisdom. It could be acquired by a *phronimos*, a practically wise person, through experience” (Eisner, 2002, p.381). Thus, the clear distinction between the scholar teacher and the reflective practitioner models of teacher education is the positioning of professional experience within the programs. The MTeach, as an example of the reflective

practitioner model, has professional experience in the middle of teaching semesters rather than at the end. In addition, the case studies constitute an attempt at learning from experience, albeit one that is mediated through the author's interpretation.

Action research is an ideal pedagogy to achieve *phronesis*. In this program, it is positioned at the end so that students can complete an action research project whilst they are on their nine-week internship. It is hoped that the students have developed the kind of *phronetic* thinking required for action research through their analysis and creation of case stories in the previous three semesters.

In the next section of the paper, Margo as a recent graduate of the program (2008) gives her perspective on how the ambitious goals of the program in seeking *phronesis* are received by the students. In this section of the paper, Margo as author becomes Margo as participant as this narrative was written soon after she completed the program. Margo as author has worked with Tony over the last four years to critically reflect on this narrative and what it might mean for the role of action research in this program.

NARRATIVE DATA: MARGO'S EXPERIENCE OF THE MTEACH

"Make good teachers. Not good academics."

This is a very famous quote amongst our cohort. A pre-service science teacher, also a pharmacist, could not believe some of the rhetoric that constituted the MTeach. For him, the rhetoric defied every ounce of his academic and professional experience because it inhibited the creation of a 'teacher.'

For me, my assertion was always "both are possible with the right amount of flexibility." I do not find it acceptable that teachers are not substantially versed in the scholarship of their own subject. Nor do I find it acceptable that people who are extremely immersed in academia, but lack altogether any true potential to teach, should be teachers. Knowledge means nothing without craft.

My experience of the MTeach was, to say the least, not ideal. There were times of genuine consternation and frustration. However, it was also deeply satisfying, intensely interesting, and at times fun.

The use of case studies was pivotal in our core subjects, though for many of us this became a negative experience. Simply put, students see in a case study what they see. They do not necessarily see what the faculty wants them to see. My reflections on the case studies were entirely subjugated to what the faculty wished I would produce for them. The case studies were ostensibly a tool to solicit my reflection, but really they were a way of saying "you come to my opinion in your own time." I failed an assessment task based on a case study where we had to identify three significant issues. My own shortcomings in that assessment notwithstanding, there is no overlooking the fact the three issues

I identified were ‘wrong.’ The faculty believe that the reflective practitioner can develop at their own pace through the analysis of case studies. However, it seemed that this development must converge to a point that is philosophically acceptable to them.

The broader implications that arise from this experience have little to do with case studies and more to do with how they were used. How they were used is subject to many complicating factors. Not the least of which is the need to use them to ensure students meet certain outcomes over others. As a teacher, I empathize with the need to ensure outcomes are met. As a teacher, I also recognize this is a dangerously narrow perspective of learning. What I gained from failing that assignment was a new perspective on the issues addressed in that case study, and, more importantly, a new perspective on case studies as a whole. I learned a lot from the feedback I was given. Despite this, I failed the assessment without the right to re-submit. If you fail one assessment, you then fail the subject. You pay for the program again, and you have to do the assignment again. These are both painful realities. My exemplary academic record and my exceptional achievement in every other aspect of the subject and program were not compelling grounds upon which a re-submit could be granted. I did not meet the outcomes they wanted, therefore, I did not possess the skills to achieve those outcomes.

Herein lies, for me, the most alarming part of this situation. For all the espousing of student-centred approaches, for all the talk of how crucial it is for the learner to take the driver’s seat, when it comes to down to the bottom line, this learning environment was not able to practice what it preached. That assessment became a kind of crucible through which I became a much better teacher and academic. Whether I had passed or failed, it is the act of doing that produced my intellectual quality and teaching practice. Even in the face of being held back in the program, I had enough foresight to value that this experience, though negative, has enhanced me in some way.

Failure shines the way for growth. Humans’ relationship with failure is infinitely complex, and this is magnified in the tertiary setting. The unofficial philosophy of my undergraduate degree in drama was to “fail gloriously.” The thinking here in drama is, if you take a risk, if you innovate, if you build foundations in unfamiliar places, invest in these foundations with full force and it does not work out, keep persisting until it does. Egos, reputations, and austere conventions were not an ever-present fixture in the landscape of our learning. It can be seen that in my particular undergraduate experience in drama, failure was an impetus for growth.

The high stakes world of the MTeach degree, on the other hand, presented us with plenty of assessment barriers that we interpreted as academic arrogance. The students call it “sandstone syndrome”, an allusion to the fact that the university of Sydney is one of a group of eight of traditional universities

characterized by their use of local sandstone in their gothic architecture. For some tutors and lecturers, the thought of making the approach to learning flexible enough to use failure as a meaningful tool somehow degrades the ever-unreachable benchmark of a “world-renowned university.” This is ironic because the MTeach uses a pass / fail marking scale that is meant to decrease the competition for grades among the cohort and encourage collegial collaboration. For some of the program assignments, achieving the magic pass mark was akin to navigating a medieval maze. This maze was forested with the assumptions of the reflexive practitioner model of teacher education, which were quite inaccessible to graduate students who entered the program from diverse discipline boundaries such as drama, science, mathematics, economics, history, business, psychology and philosophy. Perhaps it might have been easier in this first semester to analyse the case studies through the theoretical lens and methods of our home disciplines rather than hastily adopt the cloak of the reflexive practitioner without any real experience of the classroom to draw upon.

I am not suggesting that the benchmark or outcomes within a pre-service teacher program be compromised in any way. It is clear to me, as it certainly was in my time in MTeach, that students who are incompetent and unsuitable for teaching should not be passed. I am suggesting that if the reflective teacher model is to be executed effectively, it has to be executed with a degree of flexibility that is relevant to that particular student body.

The assessment I have discussed above was one of the defining experiences for my entire cohort. My story of failure seemed to be the rule. The culture of the program became increasingly negative for the students. Perhaps more disturbingly, the culture of the program became something we were not participants in, but victims of. Before this assessment, students were willing to be innovative. After this assessment, they were willing to “give them what they want” at the cost of personal and professional growth as a teacher. All this, in the first semester.

Compounding these cultural crises is the distinct disjuncture between “general foundational subjects in pedagogy” and our “curriculum subjects.” In curriculum subjects, our experience was often the antithesis of what it was in faculty subjects. In my experience we were invited to be innovative, we were invited to fail, and we were invited to participate in shaping the program. Prior skills and experience were valued and an overwhelmingly positive culture was created. In curriculum subjects, we used failure as a means to improve ourselves in a genuine and practical way. As such, our reflective practice was robust and purposeful. As students, we lived two lives, only one of which we enjoyed.

These may all seem incidental anecdotes, but all this leads me to the most important point. The culture created in the program created a culture in which we learnt to be researchers. You cannot divorce the “student” from the

“researcher.” We began our research after 18 months of immersion in a faculty that prioritized outcomes over growth. Suddenly, we were expected to monitor and invest in our own growth through action research. This demanded we overlook the fact that failure was not an option before and suddenly embrace the possibility we would fail.

Our goal, we were told, was to investigate through this model of research, our teaching practice. In truth, very few people had developed a sophisticated understanding of what the term teaching practice means. We thought we understood it because we thought about teaching all the time. What we were actually doing was thinking about “strategies,” about “tools,” about “things” we could use. How we, the actual teacher, use those tools was always left out of the consideration in any meaningful way. This meant many students’ research became superficial investigations into what tools they could use, without any genuine investment in how the teacher could use their own practice to implement them. This reflects a program that was, for me, compulsive in its promotion of student-centered learning. What I do as the teacher is not as important as what the students do to learn. Subtly, but steadily, this took me out of the teaching and learning cycle.

The way we were introduced to the model of action research was flawed. We were exposed to the model in the previous semester, though not in a way that prioritized learning about the model itself, but focused on achieving a certain outcome. The philosophical framework of the research was unclear and misrepresented. Action research is as much a mindset as a practice. It is a voyage of conscientious discovery in which you, the teacher, are a litmus test of your own progress. Students still believed, just days before handing in their research, that if they did not establish a “control group” in their research, their data was meaningless. They succumbed to the sandstone syndrome, believing research without certainty is not worthwhile. Seldom did my cohort truly connect to the potency of this research model to uncover findings about their students and their own teaching that they may not have anticipated.

I made this realization about the contingency of action research at the end of my first cycle of research. This realization came about because I was so dissatisfied with the knowledge I had of this model, I took it upon myself to do broader research. It helped me re-design my second cycle to be successful in terms of living up to the Action research model. To get to this realization I had to risk subverting what the faculty wanted from me. Did they want me to improve my students’ outcomes? Did they want me to improve my teaching practice? Or, did they want me to learn to use a research model so that I had the skills I needed to improve my own teaching practice some time in the future? I decided that, no matter what they wanted, the last of these questions was most integral and the most useful. I wrote my final research paper claiming my first cycle had been a failure because, despite improving student

outcomes, it was not a concentrated investigation into teaching practice using the model of Action research. At our conference where we shared our research, I was the only person in my group to say I had failed at this research, when in truth, almost everyone had failed to a considerable degree.

The weeks before the due date saw a proliferation of fabricated data and fictional recounts because students were so unclear on what the faculty wanted until it was too late. Confusion reigned and it seemed like a frenzied guessing game. I helped people create their research to prevent them from failing. I understood they were not willing to risk discussing their own failure like I was.

Thus ends Margo's reflection.

DISCUSSION

In this section of the paper, we present two reasons why we think there is a difference between Margo's experience of the program and the intentions of the program designers. These are structural incoherence and the late introduction of action research in the program.

Structural incoherence

Connell's two models of the scholar-teacher and reflective-practitioner outlined in the first part of this paper speak directly to the dilemma of the uncertain foundations of the MTeach. For Tony, as program coordinator and as a teacher in the program that the reflective practitioner or the phronetic model is the dominant influence on the design of the program. However, there are structural impediments to the coherent expression of this model in the teaching of the program. These are the division of the program into three main areas of study, the duplication of cohorts in curriculum subjects, and the imperatives of a research-intensive university.

The MTeach program is divided into three main areas of study. Study One is comprised of a range of compulsory areas of study, such as ICT and Inclusive Education. It also includes a sequence of four subjects that introduce pre-service teachers to sociology, psychology, philosophy, and history in an integrated manner. This sequence of subjects employs the case-based, critical inquiry approach described earlier in the paper and supported by the program designers in various publications (see Ewing & Smith, 2002 & Ewing, Hughes and Goldstein, 2008). As such, it remains the most explicit expression of the reflective practitioner DNA that is embedded in the design of the program. Study Two consists of the curriculum specialization units that each student needs to complete for their areas in which they teach. The prospective primary teachers complete a subject in all of the six primary key learning areas whilst the erstwhile secondary teachers complete units in each of their teaching specializations. Both the primary and secondary curriculum units operate as separate entities from

the Study 1 strand and do not adopt the same pedagogical principles. Study 3 consists of the three professional experience units. Only the last of these experiences, the 9-week internship, has a discernible pedagogical approach in that it is closely aligned with a concurrent action-research unit.

The dislocation of the Study 1 and Study 2 strands of the program is magnified by the duplication of the MTeach and BEd cohorts in the secondary curriculum units. Whilst this has been done for economic reasons, the result is that the lecturer in charge of secondary curriculum units is teaching students who are being taught in either the reflective-practitioner or scholar-teacher mode in their other subjects. This means that even in the unlikely event that the curriculum coordinator subscribed to either of the overall models in their pedagogical approach, it would be near impossible to achieve a cohesive philosophy across both cohorts.

There is also an underlying pressure in a research-intensive university to focus on the type of research that has status in the wider University. Unfortunately, the reflective practitioner model with its focus on classroom-based research is invariably overshadowed by the higher status “theoretical” research of the foundational educational subjects of sociology, history, and psychology that are aligned with the scholar-teacher model. This inferior status impedes the realization of the reflective practitioner model as the Study One subjects in the MTeach that focus on case studies of practice and critical inquiry are not attractive to the foundational scholars in the faculty to teach. In our faculty, the foundational scholars tend to have more clearly aligned research and teaching responsibilities with clear discipline and workload boundaries that enable a more efficient use of their time. In contrast, the reflective practitioner community is as amorphous as the range of disciplines that they cover in their teaching. For an ambitious academic in our faculty, it is not seen as a wise move to join the more eclectic and amorphous community.

Action-research introduced too late in the program

The late introduction of action research in the program sees the students struggling to understand a new method of reflecting on their teaching whilst at the same time coming to terms with the demands of the teaching internship. As Margo has claimed in this paper, this may have led some students to adopt a modified or scaled down version of action research on their internship.

The reflexivity that is built into the Study One sequence of subjects should provide a great preparation for the practice of action research. However, the lack of cohesion among the different strands of the program, or even the explicit signposting of this phronesis to students, means that this reflexivity is not conveyed effectively to the students. Contextualization is everything in phronetic social science (Flyvberg, 2001), and the political context of teacher education has changed remarkably in the 17 years since the MTeach was created.

Standards-driven reform has moved the political compass in teacher education across Australia away from the values-rationality in the original program design to a means-rationality (Flyvberg, 2001) that emerges as the program is subject to the accreditation processes in teacher education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE USE OF ACTION RESEARCH AS A PEDAGOGY OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Margo's reflection points to the apparent weakness of action research being introduced in the last semester of the program. This leaves us with a political and intellectual challenge to the reflexive practitioner model that is its foundation. The political challenge is that teacher education accreditation in Australia continues to doggedly move towards standards-based frameworks supported by the orthodoxy of evidence-based practice. The intellectual challenge resides in the reality that action research is incompatible with the scholar teacher paradigm and the orthodoxy of evidence-based practice. We conclude by questioning the political naiveté of pursuing *phronesis* amidst such obvious constraints.

Connell's evocation of the scholar teacher model of teacher education is but a romantic vision of a history where teacher educators were not constrained by the audit regimes of a neoliberalist state (Connell, 2009). The scholar teacher is grounded in the foundationalist tradition where a deep understanding of the episteme of teaching, or education, was seen as a pre-requisite to the mastery of the act of teaching itself (Loughran, 2006). As outlined in this paper, this philosophy is still deeply embedded in the sandstone of the institution where we work and study. Action research is fundamentally about *phronesis*, or the creation of professional learning, that is contingent, particular and bounded to context. Action research is therefore incompatible with a scholar teacher model of teacher education that promotes a program built on the knowing of a theoretical *episteme* gained on-campus to be applied in the *techné* of teaching practice at schools. This would importantly delimit the objectives of the MTeach by making explicit what approach the program *does not* cover, at the very least, to the teaching staff who are teaching across programs in their curriculum subjects.

The evidence-based approach to education is also philosophically incompatible with action research because of its emphasis on one type of scientific evidence that is procured through the use of the scientific method. However, it is not as easily dismissed as the scholar-teacher because of its prevalence in educational programs. This is more so the case when one considers that action research in our program is actualised as a method of teacher improvement guided by curriculum outcomes, teacher standards, and universal models of pedagogy such as the Quality Teaching / Productive Pedagogies performative frameworks (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003; Hayes, 2005). This model is not dissimilar to the classroom experiment model proposed by evidence-based

educators such as Marzano (2003) or Petty (2009) and is the structure that we have employed in 2009-2012 in the Internship Action research subject that Margo endured in 2008. This type of action research for teacher improvement can work within the competency frameworks as well as include aspects of data mapping and collection that are promoted within an evidence-based model. This appropriation of action research for the purposes of teacher and system improvement has its critics (Groundwater-Smith & Irwin, 2009) as this model might not lead students to engage in the type of external reflexivity that would lead to system change rather than just improvement. This idea is captured in one of Ponte's criteria for action research:

Learning for the purpose of professional practice can, according to Ponte (2007), be geared not solely to instrumental knowledge (what strategies do we normally have at our disposal and how can we apply them?), but also to ideological knowledge (what goals do we essentially want to achieve with our strategies and what are the moral-ethical pros and cons involved? (Ax, Ponte & Brouwer., 2008, p.57)

Ponte possibly exaggerates the distinction between ideological and instrumental knowledge; all knowledge is in some way ideological. The argument here is that our students might fail to grasp the phronetic opportunity of the internship in their pursuit of the grades needed to finish the degree. As such, the nature of a teaching internship, with the attendant pressures of certification and the need to impress potential future employers, currently lends itself more to a focus on teaching improvement rather than an induction into a phronetic mode of reflexive practice.

Margo's narrative is a sobering reminder of the power differentials that pertain in tertiary education regardless of the espoused philosophy of the program designers and teachers. The learning experience she described is far from the Habermasian "ideal speech situation" where consensus is arrived by "the force of argument alone" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.98). Habermas's utopian humanist construct is blind to the assessment power games of the kind Margo experienced. Instead, it may be more useful to turn to a post-structuralist explication of a phronetic social science that is also geared towards a values-rationality but also addresses the issue of power:

the purpose of social science is not to develop theory, but to contribute to society's practical rationality in elucidating where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to a diverse sets of values and interests. (Flyvbjerg, 2001 p.167)

Flyvbjerg's three questions of where we are, where we want to go and what is desirable might describe a way forward at both the micro level of the action research project for the students as well as at the macro level for the program instructors. It would at least begin a conversation about the political realities of the current context for teacher education in Australia rather than naively attempting to impose a pastiche of phronesis onto what is an instrumentalist core.

CONCLUSION

We began this paper by introducing the framework of action research as a method, goal or foundation (after Ax, Ponte and Brouwer, 2008) for teacher education. It is clear from Margo's narrative that we are failing on all fronts in the current iteration of the program. We have attributed this failing to significant political and intellectual constraints.

The scholar teacher model is informed by an epistemic orientation to educational knowledge and accompanied by isolated bouts of teaching practice that embody a technical orientation to the practical application of this educational knowledge. In contrast, the reflective practitioner model that informs the MTeach program was founded on a phronetic ideal where practical wisdom is derived from the critical analysis of teaching practice, both of others, via case studies/observation, and the researcher / practitioner's own thorough critical reflection in a community of inquiry. If this orientation is made explicit throughout the program, and if not added as a pedagogical after-thought at the end, action research is a perfect fit within this phronetic model.

The hard political reality of teacher education in Australia is that the dominant program is evidence-based practice in relation to both the conduct of education in schools as well as in schools of teacher education. This hegemony influences the conduct of teacher education programs through audit regimes that enforce instrumentalist goals. This instrumentalism constitutes a fundamental challenge to a phronetic model of teacher education to an extent that it may be futile to pursue methods such as action research in the current climate.

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TONY LOUGHLAND commenced his teaching career with a desire to ameliorate the disadvantages caused by social class through pedagogy. This journey has taken him through a teaching career in primary schools through to an academic career focusing on sociology, pedagogy and models of effective learning for pre-service and practising teachers.

MARGO BOWEN is the enrichment officer and drama teacher at Turrumurra High School. In her role as enrichment officer she is leading school wide teaching and learning initiatives. Her latest initiative is creating a cross-correlations marking schemes to implement cross-curriculum projects in Year 10.

TONY LOUGHLAND a débuté sa carrière en enseignement avec le désir de combler les désavantages induits par l'appartenance à une classe sociale à l'aide de la pédagogie. Cette aventure l'a amené à enseigner à l'école primaire puis à poursuivre une carrière universitaire en se concentrant sur la sociologie, la pédagogie et les modèles d'apprentissage efficaces pour les futurs enseignants et ceux déjà dans le milieu.

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