

WHEN LEARNING IS LEARNt:
UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
PRIOR LEARNING, EFFICACY AND ACTION,
REFLECTION AND THEORY MAKING IN
BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (Primary)
INTERN TEACHER LEARNING

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DEDICATION

THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO MY HUSBAND

PHIL

AND OUR CHILDREN

HEIDI, BEN, SARAH AND BRONNIE

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Studying for this doctorate has been an unexpected, exacting and yet fulfilling journey. I did not set out to do a PhD– I am a teacher at heart! However, the transition from teaching in my primary school classroom to lecturing in the Bachelor of Education (BEd) Program at the University of New England provided a significant catalyst for my evolution to researcher. I came to the realisation that greater knowledge concerning teacher education student and intern teacher’ learning, in particular critical reflection, was needed to shape coursework, practicum, internship and professional teaching standards.

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researchers and educators we have a responsibility to be increasingly exact in the way we prepare our teachers with the professional competencies to teach and the intra-personal qualities to learn.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the nature of intern teacher learning during the final ten-week internship of a Bachelor of Education (Primary) - BEd - degree. Its key purposes were to understand BEd intern teachers' learning, and to test the researcher-developed LEARNt theoretical framework. This framework is a synthesis of key aspects of Mezirow's transformative learning, Korthagen's core reflection, and Bandura's conceptualisation of self-efficacy belief.

Sixty-six final-year BEd students completed the Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy Teacher Sense of Efficacy (TSE) Scale and the researcher-developed Learner Self-Efficacy Beliefs (LSEB) Survey. The volunteers were grouped into high, medium or low overall efficacy, based on Rasch analysis of the survey data. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with 26 interns (N=8 High Overall Efficacy (HOE), N=10 Medium Overall Efficacy (MOE), and N=8 Low Overall Efficacy (LOE) interns) concerning the "most challenging experience" of their internships. Interview data were analysed initially using NVivo, and later coded by applying the LEARNt theoretical framework as an "a priori template of codes". Intern teacher learning was understood in terms of transformative, adaptive, or reflex-ive approaches and outcomes.

Of the 26 interns, 16 demonstrated critical reflection and transformative learning, six demonstrated non-critical reflection and adaptive learning; and four demonstrated non-reflection and reflex-ive learning. Within-case analysis revealed a range of factors that impacted on each approach to learning. Problematic school environments (owing to student and/or staff behaviour) with high levels of mentor teacher support were key factors in the majority of interns' transformative approaches to learning. Non-problematic, high-support environments enhanced the majority of interns' adaptive approaches. In contrast, highly problematic, low support, or problem-free, highly supportive, environments were relevant factors common across interns' reflex-ive approaches. Cross-case analysis revealed that entrusting the intern teacher with autonomy was a more critical factor than context and support in shaping interns' learning. All interns who engaged in transformative and adaptive approaches were afforded autonomy, which ensured the opportunity to test, and the potential to critically reflect upon, prior learning.

Two of the major findings in this study contribute to the literature that examines the relationships amongst critical reflection, self-efficacy belief, and learning. Firstly, it was found that irrespective of elevated or diminished general teacher efficacy, or context- and task-specific self-efficacy belief, intern teachers with the meta-cognitive capacity for critical learning engaged in mastery thinking and behaviours. This finding is in contrast to current literature, which suggests that these attributes are restricted to high-efficacy teachers. Secondly, new knowledge was synthesised regarding sources of self-efficacy belief. The meta-cognitive capacity of the intern teacher to reflect critically and achieve authenticity (evidenced by increased congruence between beliefs and actions) proved a more significant source of self-efficacy than mastery, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and physiological states.

In terms of theory testing, the theoretical framework developed in 2009 integrated a number of concepts to describe Learning, namely Efficacy informing Actions, and Reflection (in and on) action engendering or maintaining Theory. The acronym **LEARnT** describes the original framework for understanding the multi-dimensional nature of intern teacher learning. After considering the findings of this study, five concepts central to the original framework remained, and four concepts, namely, prior Learning, context/support (belonging/autonomy), dissonance and self-efficacy beliefs (context and task specific) were integrated into the LEARnT (2012) theoretical framework.

The research-informed iteration of LEARnT provides an original and significant contribution to the body of knowledge in understanding the nature of learning and more specifically teacher education student and intern teacher learning. This contribution has implications for dialogue, design and delivery of university- and school-based teacher education.

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