

Delving Deep into the Society of Your Mind

Dialogical Self Theory as a Self-Reflection Tool for Self-Study Researchers

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Initial Teacher Education

Self-Study

School-based Teacher Educator

Dialogical Self Theory

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Arts-based Research

This study sits within the larger framework of my Doctoral self-study, which is focused on my mentoring practice within the role of a School-Based Teacher Educator, and how best to navigate the competing responsibilities and tensions within the role. This study focuses on my use of Dialogical Self Theory, and Arts Informed Research to reflect upon the complementary and contrasting duties, responsibilities and loyalties within the role of the School-Based Teacher Educator and the tensions that can arise.

I teach Art and Technology in a Government Secondary College in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, in Victoria, Australia. Within the initial teacher education process in Victoria, the school staff who work with pre-service teachers during their practicum component must act as supervisor, assessor, and mentor, roles that can cause tension (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Martin, 1996; McGraw & Davis, 2017; Patrick, 2013). I identify the role I fulfill during this process of working with pre-service teachers as that of a School-Based Teacher Educator, a term that is coming into use, particularly among Australian researchers (Feiman-Nemser, 2006; Forgasz, 2017; Goodfellow & Sumsion, 2010; Grimmer, et al., 2018; Hastings, 2008). I have selected to use this term, rather than more commonly used terms such as co-operating or mentor teacher, as it acknowledges the complex nature of the role and the significant impact that school-based mentors have on the learning of pre-service teachers (Forgasz, 2017). Its use could also help to flatten the perception of hierarchy between university and school staff involved in initial teacher education.

Background

This paper will focus on how I have used Dialogical Self Theory and Arts Informed Research methods to assist in identifying, analysing and navigating the inherent tensions I face within the role of a School-Based Teacher Educator. While there is some acknowledgment in mentoring research of tensions such as divided loyalties between the needs of their school students and the Pre-Service Teachers (Aderibigbe, et al., 2016; Clarke, et al., 2014; Evans & Abbott, 1997; Patrick, 2013; Rajuan, et al., 2007; White & Forgasz, 2016), further research is needed to investigate how this tension affects the role (Zuzovsky, et al., 1998). There is a need for research to understand the work of school-based teacher educators (McDonough, 2014), and from their perspective (Wideen, 1998) as there is a lack of knowledge about the work they do (Clarke et al., 2014; Goodfellow, 2000; Goodfellow & Sumsion, 2010). McDonough (2014) and others tell us

that the role of a School-Based Teacher Educator is difficult, as they face tensions caused by conflicting loyalty, advocacy and the divided responsibilities between their role as a classroom teacher and as a School-Based Teacher Educator (Forgasz, 2017; Graham, 2006; Rajuan et al., 2007). The first priority of School-Based Teacher Educators is their students (Clarke et al., 2014; Evans & Abbott, 1997; Graham, 2006) and they are concerned about the quality of care and education their students will receive from the Pre-Service Teachers (Goodfellow, 2000; Hastings, 2008; Rajuan et al., 2007; Rikard & Veal, 1996; Uusimaki, 2013).

The sheer complexity of the role of a School-Based Teacher Educator combined with the duties of a classroom teacher makes for a demanding position. The research identifies a range of activities ascribed to the role of the School-Based Teacher Educator, and some, such as assessment of Pre-Service Teacher performance, and providing support and nurturing, are in opposition, and can, therefore, create tension (Grimmett et al., 2018), or be seen as incompatible (Zuzovsky et al., 1998). The use of Dialogical Self Theory and Arts Informed Research methods allowed me to give a voice to the various aspects of 'self' that make up my role as a School-Based Teacher Educator. It encouraged me to delve deeper into the various aspects of 'self' that contribute to the complicated role of a School-Based Teacher Educator, such as 'I as Mentor', 'I as Teacher' and 'I as Supervisor'.

Theoretical Framework

The 'Dialogical Self' is a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions in the society of mind" (Meijers & Hermans, 2018, p.9). These I-positions relate to different roles in our life or different viewpoints we may hold. For example, 'I as Teacher', 'I as Wife', 'I as Daughter', and 'I as LGBTQB+ ally'. Stewart (2018) suggests that the use of Dialogical Self Theory to engage in a dialogue between multiple I-positions can support a teacher's ability to recognise and respond to moments of dissonance and use these tensions to increase their capacity for self-reflection. Another concept of Dialogical Self Theory that is useful in this context is that of the meta-position. The use of a meta-position provides distance from the individual I-positions. Although it can be drawn to particular positions, it provides a broad, overarching view that allows one to consider different positions simultaneously (Stewart, 2018). The meta-position allows us to postpone reactions, and facilitate a more encompassing view on self and world. This provides an important executive function during the process of decision-making (Hermans, 2013). Use of Dialogical Self Theory in my self-study encouraged deep self-reflection. Dialogical Self Theory may also provide additional clarity in analysis and decision-making moving forward throughout both my research and within the role of a School-Based Teacher Educator.

In this study, I facilitated consideration of the meta-position through a form of Arts Informed Research; scripting a discussion between what I see as the four primary 'I' positions affecting my role as a School-Based Teacher Educator; 'I as Mentor', 'I as Supervisor', 'I as School Teaching Staff' and 'I as Art Teacher'. Weber and Mitchell (2004) argue that Arts Informed Research is a powerful tool for self-study researchers to explore, understand, re-interpret, and communicate their personal experience in new ways. A broad range of artistic forms can be used to provoke self-reflection, whether in response to existing art, such as popular movies/TV, photography or fine art, or as a means of self-expression such as narrative writing, poetry or performance. The reflective nature of artistic inquiry, as well as the implicit discipline of many artistic processes, makes it well suited to self-study research (Weber & Mitchell, 2004). In their chapter of the *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices*, Weber and Mitchell (2004) identify ten key factors that make art-based methods so powerful for use in self-study research. Three of these resonated particularly with me in relation to this study. The *reflexive* nature of art-based research allows the work to be connected to 'self' yet also distanced, which encourages the meta-position within Dialogical Self Theory. The *holistic* nature of art-based research allows us to keep the whole and the part in view simultaneously. Art-based research can also facilitate *empathy*, as it can highlight how the study of one can resonate with the experiences of many.

Objectives

The focus of this study relates to the research question in my doctoral study, 'How can the tensions and multi-faceted responsibilities within the role of the School-Based Teacher Educator be navigated and addressed?' Before I can discover how to address these issues, I must identify and understand their complexities. The research question for this study, therefore, is 'How can the use of Dialogical Self Theory facilitate self-reflection and analytical consideration of the role of the School-Based Teacher Educator?' I have used Dialogical Self Theory and Arts Informed Research to develop my understanding of the multi-faceted nature of the School-Based Teacher Educator role and begin to identify the inherent tensions. This will enhance data collection and analysis in my over-arching doctoral study. Through this self-study, and my Ph.D., I aim to contribute to an understanding of the complexities of the School-Based Teacher Educator role. Ultimately, I hope to have an impact on Initial Teacher Education, by improving my own practice, sharing useful findings to other practitioners, and increasing knowledge about the School-Based Teacher Educator role. Initial Teacher Education is of great importance, and it is essential that School-Based Teacher Educators like myself have a thorough grasp of the mentoring process and the role they play (Ambrosetti, et al., 2014).

Method

This research began when my Ph.D. supervisors first introduced me to Dialogical Self Theory. The concept of the various 'I' positions holding different views and working together to create my overall self was very useful in visualising some of the contradictions and tensions I had personally felt within my role as a School-Based Teacher Educator. This led to the first step in the process I have undertaken; the creation of a Venn diagram to illustrate the various 'I' positions I felt most affected my role as a School-Based Teacher Educator. Generating the diagram began with a process of self-reflection of my memories of past Pre- Service Teacher practicum placements in my classroom, as well as my thoughts in relation to my role as a School-Based Teacher Educator and the relevant existing research. In this first incarnation, the diagram covered five separate roles, under the umbrella of 'I as Lifelong Learner'. The complex Venn diagram explored 'I as School Teaching Staff', 'I as Art Teacher', 'I as Supervisor', 'I as Mentor' and 'I as Art Practitioner' using the online presentation software 'Prezi', to allow the diagram to be interactive and of unlimited size and detail. An organic, intuitive creation developed over several weeks as I added words and phrases illustrating the priorities and responsibilities I felt within each 'I' position.

The next step in my process of exploration of self was to create a play script showcasing a conversation between each of these five 'I' positions, discussing the upcoming arrival of a Pre-Service Teacher for their practicum placement. This cathartic process occurred spontaneously when I could not stop thinking about the interactions between the various 'selves' that were apparent in my School-Based Teacher Educator role. It cleared my head and allowed me to take a mental step back and look at the larger picture. As I composed the script, I was able to illustrate how I mentally negotiate some of my internal conflicts and develop a balanced position. In this sense, explicitly illustrating the varied and sometimes conflicting views of each 'I' position, particularly in the script format, created a discussion akin to a Critical Friend interaction, allowing me to step backwards and look at my thoughts with a balanced view. Throughout this process of self-reflection, my PhD supervisors also fulfilled the role of being critical friends. As Stolle, Frambaugh-Kritzer, Freese & Perrson (2018) identify, critical friends can be seen as fitting on a continuum with a wide range of characteristics. As 'experts' sitting external but adjacent to my research, they were able to provide useful content & methodological advice based on their own experience and professional expertise.

As my doctoral studies advanced and I prepared for and completed the 'Confirmation of Candidature' milestone, I continued to add thoughts to the Venn diagram. I also added two additional 'I' positions; 'I as Researcher' and 'I as Ph.D. Student'. As this research using Dialogical Self Theory became central to my plans for this presentation, I began to consider ways of visualising the Venn diagram that did not require online access. I assigned a symbol to each 'I' position and created a table with a column for each.

I then tabulated the information from the Venn diagram, noting overlap through the use of the symbols to illustrate repeated concepts across various 'I' positions. This process made me realise that some of my designated 'I' positions

did not really interact in relation to the School-Based Teacher Educator role. First, I removed 'I as Art Practitioner'. I then rewrote the script, removing this role, and condensing and clarifying the content. As I considered the remaining six 'I' positions, I decided that 'I as Researcher' and 'I as Ph.D. Student' were also distinctly separate from the responsibilities and tensions of the School-Based Teacher Educator role. They stood without, looking in, rather than actively participating in my professional decision-making process. 'I as Researcher' does mainly coincide with the meta-position, but does not interact enough to need inclusion in the diagram. This left four 'I' positions; 'I as Supervisor', 'I as Mentor', 'I as Art Teacher', and 'I as School Teaching Staff' (See Table 1). The resulting table was now much clearer and easier to comprehend.

Table 1

The Priorities and Responsibilities of my Dialogical Self within the Role of School-Based Teacher Educator

I as Art Teacher	I as School Teaching Staff	I as Supervisor	I as Mentor
My students receive a quality Art education	My students receive a quality Art education	My students receive a quality Art education	My students receive a quality Art education
Viable Art Curriculum is documented	Viable Art Curriculum is documented	Pre-Service Teacher fulfils all required University criteria	I gain knowledge and understanding about what Pre-Service Teachers needs from a mentoring relationship
Pre-Service Teacher successfully educates students	Pre-Service Teacher successfully educates students	Pre-Service Teacher successfully educates students	Pre-Service Teacher successfully educates students
Student assessment completed in timely and effective manner	Student assessment completed in timely and effective manner	Student assessment completed in timely and effective manner	Student assessment completed in timely and effective manner
Emotional and physical well-being of my students is protected	Emotional and physical well-being of my students is protected	Emotional and physical well-being of my students is protected	Emotional and physical well-being of my students is protected
School AIP goals are pursued within the Learning Area	School AIP goals are pursued within the Learning Area	School AIP goals are pursued within the Learning Area	School AIP goals are pursued within the Learning Area
The art curriculum is delivered effectively and engagingly	The art curriculum is delivered effectively and engagingly	The art curriculum is delivered effectively and engagingly	The art curriculum is delivered effectively and engagingly
Learning Area goals are pursued	Learning Area goals are pursued	Learning Area goals are pursued	Learning Area goals are pursued
I develop my artistic skills		I identify personal practice that best support and instruct Pre-Service Teachers	I identify personal practice that best support Pre-Service Teachers
My students are inspired to love Art		My students are inspired to love Art	My students are inspired to love Art
My students and I have a positive learning experience		Pre-Service Teacher, Students and I have a positive learning experience	Pre-Service Teacher, Students and I have a positive learning experience
	Support future of Education by working with Pre-Service Teachers	Support future of Education by working with Pre-Service Teachers	Develop a quality mentoring relationship with Pre-Service Teachers
		Pre-Service Teacher gains assessment experience	Pre-Service Teacher gains assessment experience
		Pre-Service Teacher experiments with pedagogy	Pre-Service Teacher experiments with pedagogy
		Pre-Service Teacher becomes an effective teacher	Pre-Service Teacher becomes an effective teacher
		The Pre-Service Teacher passes their practicum	The Pre-Service Teacher passes their practicum
		Pre-Service Teacher has a productive and positive teaching experience	Pre-Service Teacher has a productive and positive teaching experience
			Emotional and physical well-being of the Pre-Service Teacher is protected
			Pre-Service Teacher has a safe space to experiment and 'fail'
			Pre-Service Teacher begins to discover their own teaching style

Findings and Discussion

Looking at the data collected through this exercise in using Dialogical Self Theory for self-reflection (see Table 1), a pattern becomes evident. It was particularly interesting that concerns about the learning experience of my school students appeared in every column, while considerations regarding the Pre-Service Teacher experience were constrained to the roles of mentor and supervisor. It was clear that my personal experience as a School-Based Teacher Educator was confirming the existing research; as a School-Based Teacher Educator, my major concern is with the well-being of my students and the quality of their learning experiences. This result was not a surprise to me, but rather confirmed my feelings about the nature of the School-Based Teacher Educator role. It allowed me, however, to look more closely at the specific issues and concerns that cause me tension within the role. This will help me to be proactive, rather than reactionary when dealing with these issues in my daily work as a School-Based Teacher Educator. Interestingly, the 'I as Mentor' position has the most individual responsibilities and concerns (i.e., that are not shared by any of the other three 'I' positions).

The process of writing the play script also highlighted additional areas of concern such as time constraints and the need for opportunities to provide guidance to Pre-Service Teachers without hindering their development or causing embarrassment. Writing the script was a way for each 'I' position to explicitly voice their concerns, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

'I-as-supervisor': We have a new Pre-Service Teacher starting soon. We need to get everything ready for their arrival. Have you all read the email from the Uni?

'I-as-art-teacher': I haven't had time. When I get these analysis essays marked, I'll get to it.

'I-as-school-teaching-staff': I skimmed it. The info they send is often not relevant to what actually happens when they come anyway. By the way, they can't teach our technology class, it's not their discipline area.

'I-as-art-teacher': I'm also nervous about them taking our year 12 class. The students are pretty self-sufficient with their practical work at the moment but really need help with their analysis. They need quality teaching. Art analysis has not always been a strength for the Pre-Service Teachers we have had in the past...

'I-as-mentor': The research says they will have a better experience, and we will develop a stronger mentoring relationship, if they do a pre-visit to meet us and see the school. So let's organise that.

'I-as-supervisor': Good, we can talk about expectations.

'I-as-art-teacher's' typing starts getting louder, as if they are hitting the keys with frustration, and their shoulders get more tense.

'I-as-art-teacher': (She pauses typing) When are we supposed to find time for that? My year 12s need feedback on their Exploration Proposal urgently, I've got to arrange the year 7 excursion, and I have six on days tomorrow and Wednesday!

Approaching each 'I' position as an individual viewpoint through the script-writing process also allowed each 'I' position to participate in the discussion to explore possible solutions and allowed me to step back and view the situation from the meta-position. Documenting my thought process in this way captured my various viewpoints in a way I may not have been fully conscious of in an internal dialogue. The following script excerpt shows how the various 'I' positions begin to negotiate the issues:

'I-as-mentor': We need to give them some input into what they are teaching, it can't be too prescribed or they won't take ownership and be fully engaged!

'I-as-supervisor': Or learn how to plan lessons, or get to experiment with pedagogy...

'I-as-school-teaching-staff': OK... when we meet on Thursday, let's explain the units we are currently working on, and suggest they plan how they would like to deliver some of the content? Then they will have some extra time to think about it and run it by us, but still have input.

'I-as-art-teacher': Yeah, that could work. I'm fine with them trying new things as long as the content is delivered properly.

'I-as-supervisor': So, how can we make sure it is? And not scare them with too much too soon?

'I-as-mentor': Or control them too much and take away their autonomy?

'I-as-researcher': Remember, we have talked about this. We will begin with co-teaching from the start. That allows us to model and provide structure, while they can both observe and be involved. Initially in a more minor way, and then we can gradually shift the balance to them leading as their confidence increases.

Implications and Outcomes

Undertaking this study has demonstrated to me how useful Dialogical Self Theory can be for deep self-reflection and understanding the multidimensional nature of complicated roles and relationships. It has also highlighted how the use of Arts Informed Research can facilitate the process. Focusing on the various 'I' positions that make up my role as a School-Based Teacher Educator provided clarity in relation to the individual responsibilities, loyalties and demands that can come into conflict during a Pre-Service Teacher's practicum in my classroom. It is clear that the personal and learning needs of my students take precedence, regardless of which 'I' position I am considering. This is such a fundamental component of my identity as 'teacher' that it comes into consideration in all aspects of my role as a School-Based Teacher Educator.

While I keep the needs of the Pre-Service Teacher in mind, the student needs will always be paramount. Being explicitly aware of this will allow me to make specific plans to facilitate the Pre-Service Teacher's freedom to experiment while safeguarding the quality of student learning. In relation to gathering data for my Doctoral self-study, it appears that critical incidents will likely arise in the area of crossover between the development of the Pre-Service Teacher's teacher identity, and the quality of the students' learning experience.

This study raises the possibility of using Dialogical Self Theory in a methodological manner to create a detailed picture of the complicated nature of professional roles and responsibilities. Dialogical Self Theory can allow the self-study researcher to step back and attain a meta-position vantage point to encourage critical reflection on their thoughts and actions. I propose that the process I undertook to analyse the role and responsibilities of a School-Based Teacher Educator could be replicated to study many complex issues, relationships, or roles impacting a self-study researcher. This could be used with or without the addition of Arts Informed Research. The steps undertaken may look something like this:

1. Brainstorm a broad range of relevant 'I' positions.
2. Reflect on each role and create a Venn diagram exploring the similar and opposing views/responsibilities/concerns/approaches etc. of each 'I' position
3. Consider the complicated overlapping areas of the diagram. Which statements overlap between positions and what opposing views are evident?
4. Chart these similarities and differences
5. Refine the list of relevant 'I' positions if interaction not evident
6. Analyse the resultant lists to gain self-awareness of detailed thought process and decision-making.

If considering this approach as a methodology, it is important to be aware that 'I' positions do not have to be an absolute, such as 'I as Teacher', but can be more nuanced. For example, labels such as 'I as Teacher who believes in student directed learning' and 'I as Teacher who gives direct instruction', may provide more detailed data. This research has highlighted to me how our thoughts and opinions can be in a constant state of flux, and using less structured 'I' positions may allow an even deeper understanding of complex issues. I intend to explore this avenue while continuing my use of Dialogical Self Theory in future research during my doctoral study.

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