TEAN Special Issue Editorial

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I am delighted to welcome Dr Lynne Graham-Matheson and Professor Vivienne Griffiths from Canterbury Christ Church University as guest editors of this special issue of the TEAN journal. Thanks are due to Lynne and Vivienne for their initiative and inspiration which have resulted in this most interesting and varied collection of papers for us all, and for all the hard work they have put in to effect its successful completion. Thanks too to the TEAN reviewers whose time and support have been, as ever, invaluable and to all the contributing authors who have given of their time and effort to present these fascinating papers.

If you have an idea for a special issue, please get in touch with TEAN to discuss.
Now over to Lynne and Vivienne to present their issue of the journal …

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Theme of the special issue: Methodological approaches to researching teacher education.
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Background
The idea for this special issue of TEAN developed from the international conference 'At the Crossroads: New Directions in Teacher Education', held at Canterbury Christ Church University in July 2012, which brought together over 200 scholars from 16 countries. It was striking that a sizeable number of papers focussed on specific methodologies used in researching teacher education, representing a growing interest in this area. The six articles published here, originally presented at the conference, represent just some of the different and innovative methodological approaches being used in current studies. The special issue will be of particular interest to teacher educators working on research in the field. It will also be of relevance to anyone with an interest in research methodologies and approaches to research into professional learning and development.

Context: challenges and change
For more than a decade, tensions have been noted around the role and position of teacher education in academia (Maguire, 2000; McNally & Menter, 2009), due to its uneasy dual positioning between schools and universities. A range of international studies note the particular challenges for new teacher educators, especially those moving from schools into universities and engaging in difficult transitions (Dinkelman et al., 2006; Swennen et al., 2010; Wood & Borg, 2010). The need for support and induction into research, particularly for new teacher educators, has been well documented (Griffiths et al., 2010; Harrison & McKeon, 2008; Murray et al., 2009; van Velzen et al., 2010). Little specific attention, however, has been paid to the range and characteristics of research methodologies used in such research; thus it has been difficult to make comparisons between, or general inferences about, the findings.

An exception to this is self-study, a rapidly developing methodology in teacher education research (Lunenberg et al., 2011; Williams & Ritter, 2010), perhaps reflecting the need for collaborative approaches which draw on, and are integrated into, teacher educators' everyday work. Even within this broad genre, varieties of approach to self-study are emerging, with some teacher educators positioning themselves as ethnographers (McGregor et al., 2011) and others as action researchers (Draper et al., 2011; Houston et al., 2010). What such studies seem to have in common is a desire for research-led approaches which lead to 'shared meaning making' (McGgregor et al.: 169). We would argue that this is of great importance at a time when teacher education is undergoing intense changes, both in the UK and globally.

Articles in this special issue
The first article in this special issue, by Karen Vincent and Judith Roden, is an example of a self-study approach being used by a new teacher educator, who is a novice researcher, working with an experienced colleague to develop professional and research identities. The use of metaphor here helps to describe and explain personal experiences and critical incidents, as well as approaches to teaching and learning used with student teachers. The authors argue that autobiographical and narrative accounts of lived lives are a powerful tool to explore and problematise everyday practices, and have important implications for teacher education courses.

Carey Philpott's article develops Wertsch's sociological approach to narrative, drawing for example on fairy tales as narrative templates, and focuses on student teachers' own accounts, in order to present the argument that narrative research is one of the best ways to develop professional knowledge in beginning teachers. She argues that this is because teacher knowledge consists of knowledge of the identities of teachers and learners, and of the intentions of participants in the classroom, as well as how these things might change over time. However, rather than privileging personal autonomy in narrative construction, Philpott emphasises the importance of sociocultural contexts in shaping narrative accounts.

Viv Wilson's article describes how cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) can be used to examine teacher education. Arising initially from the work of Vygotsky, she argues that CHAT provides a useful methodological framework for considering social and cultural practices and for better understanding the different motives that are brought to an 'activity system' by various participants. She illustrates this with some examples of how CHAT has been used as an analytical tool in studies of teacher education, in both school and university contexts, and argues that it is particularly illuminating in cases of 'boundary crossing', such as former teachers becoming university teacher educators.

The article by Liz Hryniewicz, Vivienne Griffiths and Simon Thompson investigates an innovative visual method, living graphs, used alongside in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of teacher educators in two universities. The authors describe the different processes used in trialling this method, and argue that the results demonstrate the power of visual expression to provide, not just complementary material to oral accounts, but in some cases contradictory responses not revealed through the interviews. They emphasise the need for further exploration of and guidelines for this interesting method of data collection, which the participants themselves perceived as powerful and revealing.

A study of teacher education in two colleges in Israel, carried out by Manal Yazbak Abu Ahmad and Aliza Yahav, focusses on an English language course which explored diversity issues with student teachers, using collaborative e-learning and reflective journals. The authors decided to use online fora as a way of bridging personal and cultural as well as geographical distances, arguing that this 'coping with conflict' model can diffuse intercultural tensions and create a more equal sphere of communication. The online meetings and follow up discussions were mediated sensitively by the

researchers, who argue that a one year course is the minimum length needed in order for students to acknowledge preconceptions and prejudices and hopefully move forward into new mutual understandings. The study findings are challenging, but we think provide an important perspective on dealing with diversity in extreme circumstances.

In the final article, Margit Sutrop explores a values-based approach to teacher education, using a practical tool developed in Estonia - the Teachers' Values Game – based on group discussions of real life cases, which enables teachers to reflect critically on their own values and ethical issues. The aim of this game is to help beginning teachers understand how values influence their decision making, learn how to discuss value dilemmas and justify their decisions.

Lynne Graham-Matheson and Vivienne Griffiths

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