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F. Tony Carusi

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Between the teacher and educator: a political analysis of an impossible combination

F. Tony Carusi 

Institute of Education, Massey University, Te Papaioea, Aotearoa

ABSTRACT

This article responds to some of the recent challenges issued to the field of teacher education constituted “between principle, politics, and practice.” By discussing the teacher educator as a tautology, the article analyses education policy and research discourses to illustrate how different politics are generated by the tautological character of the teacher educator’s title. The article concludes with a consideration of the limits of the educational in light of the politics of teacher education that emerges from the analyses.

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This article responds to some of the recent challenges issued to the field of teacher education constituted “between principle, politics, and practice” (Biesta et al., 2020) within two contexts. First, the teacher educator is part of a policy focus in Aotearoa¹ that positions teacher educators in causal terms according to a “science of learning.” Second, the teacher educator has been conceptualised in educational research according to various models of reflective practice. While there are many reasons for each context to be critical of the other, a shared feature between them is their respective figures of the teacher educator that rely on the difference and sameness that their title evokes. A teacher is and is not an educator and vice-versa. I take up this doubling that isn’t quite identical between the teacher and the educator in terms of tautology. In doing so, I offer some conceptual and theoretical terms in the analysis of policy and research discourses that show how different politics emerge from each specifically as the teacher is played off the educator. More generally, these examples show the between of teacher and educator as generative of politics rather than immune from or external to them.

Facing the challenges to teacher education directly, readers will note the various calls for and formations of conceptual work to be done. Of the eight challenges, three refer specifically to the concept:

- Reclaim a practically meaningful, intellectually rigorous and politically astute *conception* of teaching.

CONTACT Tony Carusi  F.A.Carusi@massey.ac.nz  Institute of Education, Massey University, Te Papaioea, Aotearoa

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- Identify resources that will help to strengthen the field *conceptually* and thereby expanding its cognitive jurisdiction, while also perhaps mapping the territory more thoroughly.
- Re-engage with the politics of education as teacher educators, both within our research and writing and more broadly, so that collectively we can make the case for an educational *conception* of education, that is not lost behind questions about efficacy, efficiency and meeting imposed standards (Biesta et al., 2020, pp. 457-58, emphasis added).

What role does the concept of teaching play in teacher education? What antagonisms do teachers educators confront in the attempt to conceptualise their work? Where does a teacher educator locate and develop an educational conception of education when lost? These are questions that require more than what the space of an article allows for in a response. However, in what follows, I will make some attempt at developing tautology as a way to conceptualise teacher education and its people on at least two fronts: the socio-political leverage assigned to teacher educators through education policy discourse and research and the work of thought-practice that conceptualises the reflective teacher educator. Between these fronts, the educational status of teacher education takes shape not only educationally, but politically as well.

Characterised as two fronts, each one embeds and employs convictions and world-views about the teacher educator that are in conflict with one another. However, this is not to imply a political essentialism in which they are two ahistorical sides of a single antagonism. They *can be* two sides of a single antagonism, but this is not a necessary relation. For instance, the way a particular teacher thinks and practices teaching is, at times, the very thing leveraged “out” by education policy and research that promotes notions of “best practice,” which removes the thought-practice of particular teachers in favour of a universal class of Teacher stripped of their particularity, and values “what works” in the classroom, which removes the happenstance and experimental failure that individual teachers invite, endure and enact (Carusi, 2024; Oliverio, 2023). In a scenario bounded by best practice and what works, teachers are a site of normalisation that research and policy seek to replicate. Both the particular teacher and the class of Teacher, in this case, become aligned on opposite sides of a single antagonism over the role of the teacher. But these fronts do not necessarily form two opposing sides. For example, the thought-practice of a teacher can occasionally ignore policy and research to explore with students the unexpected, the de-curricular and the uncertain, an occurrence that may seed later politics but arrives without preparation and ready-made know-how. In this instance, a politics of teaching is decoupled from the normative front of research and policy, which is not to say decoupled from horizons completely and hence why a politics of teaching appears across multiple fronts and remains irreducible to a single antagonism. In other words, the political tensions that I tease out in this article are constitutive of teacher educators and teacher education in an historical sense, rather than constitutive in an essential sense. A historical rather than essential notion of the teacher educator is important for my claims about the educational, which I discuss in the conclusion.

In what follows, I will introduce the notion of tautology as it appears in educational contexts and theory to locate its use as a critical method and practice. I then detail the two fronts sketched above to elaborate how both use tautology to conceptualise the teacher

educator. Then to conclude, I will address the political terrain formed by and between the teacher educator to suggest that an educational conception of education is already political.

A note on tautologies

Recent philosophical work treats the teacher and the educator separately. Biesta (2023) traces teaching to early meanings of indicating, pointing and showing, which he connects to the teacher's role in directing and forming students' attention (p. 259). Masschelein (2010) and myself (Carusi, 2024) focus on the educator as an exercise of leading-out-of, *ex-ducere*. One could reconcile the two, especially as Biesta and Masschelein both emphasise the role of directing attention in their separate treatments. An approach such as this sutures the teacher and the educator with their shared reliance on attention, for example. To venture a definition, the teacher educator is one who leads-out-of by directing students' attention. Such a characterisation unifies the teacher and the educator and makes the teacher educator tautological, that is each word, teacher and educator, comes to share the same definition. Yet tautologies do not always behave so harmoniously. As I will make clear, education research and policy discourses conceive of the teacher educator by splitting their difference, rather than reconciling them. Beyond philosophical conceptualisations, the difference between the teacher and the educator takes on political and practical conceptualisations as well.

The tautology of the teacher educator is its weakness and its strength. It can be used as an animating principle to map the unending processes of practice and revision that make up the work of the reflective teacher (Rodgers, 2002; Schön, 2017; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). It can also serve to deride teacher educators as slow to change, even "woeful," as the New Zealand Minister of Education recently remarked (Walters, 2024). This sort of derision takes numerous forms, but perhaps the most widespread relies on some version of the claim that the teacher is the most significant in-school factor in raising student achievement. I have critiqued the best evidence syntheses used to support this claim (Alton-Lee, 2003; Timperley et al., 2007) for the problematic assumptions that form their initial selection criteria (Carusi, 2022) and highlighted via Simpson (2018) their flawed use of effect size. However, this claim continues to be used as the evidence and justification for making teachers responsible for social changes they have no control over (Carusi & Niwa, 2020). Taken together, the self-sustaining loop of thought-practice that makes up notions of the reflective teacher can serve as a bulwark against the contrived urgency of policy reforms to redefine institutional practices of schooling in terms of party-aligned visions of societal success. Trapped or embraced, teacher educators are caught up in a tautology of more than their own making.

But what is tautology? Etymologically, the term comes from ancient Greek and is made of *tauto* (the same) and *logos* (an account or word), which loosely translates into the same word or account. When someone communicates tautologically, they repeat what has already been said, often by them. A familiar example of tautology is found in redundancy. Imagine someone answering the phone with "This is the Department of Redundancy Department." The word "Department" is used twice and adds no new meaning to its initial use, i.e., one could say the same thing by removing one of the instances of "Department." Here *tauto* expresses a sameness that is excessive and unnecessary, as contrasted, for

instance, from *auto* which denotes a sameness of self, e.g., auto-motive as self-moving. As a formula, tautology can be expressed as $A = A$, which states that some subject or object A is that subject or object A , which is to say nothing of A , or to say in too many words what amounts to saying the same thing: A is itself.

Tautology is a term found in many educational settings: the disciplines of mathematics, philosophy and rhetoric as well as the classrooms of critical thinking and first-year writing seminars. At an introductory level, teachers often present tautology as an error in reasoning, a logical fallacy, and in this sense, it is generally regarded as best to avoid when making an argument. This is because a tautology results in a truism which does not allow for any discernment and says little to nothing about the subject of its focus. For instance, to write “a teacher is an educator or they are not” is a truism because the statement is true no matter what or who the teacher is. One way to understand the phrase “teacher educator” would be to point out its tautological tendency towards saying the same thing twice, i.e., a teacher is an educator is a teacher is an educator ... or as Säfström writes in reference to the emptiness produced by tautology, “an endless repetition of itself” (Säfström, 2014, p. 339). This is not to say the teacher and the educator are identical, but instead to show what can become of the teacher educator when understood as a tautological expression in this first sense, namely, the title becomes a fallacy at risk of redundancy, so to speak.

This may appear relatively straightforward so far. Tautology as an excess can be eliminated through the removal of repetition: The Department of Redundancy or, for an even leaner economy, The Redundancy Department. However, work in educational theory further elaborates tautology into a specifically educational sense beyond its status as a fallacy to be avoided. In this sense, tautology has been used tropologically rather than fallaciously, that is, as a device to figure discourses and their institutions, something I have described elsewhere with my colleague as ontological rhetorics (Carusi, 2021; Carusi & Szkudlarek, 2020). Bingham (2010) coins the phrase “presumptive tautology” to argue that what is educational about method is lost when method is generalised.² The tautological method Bingham (2010) describes first locates two different approaches to a persistent problem. In the analysis of the two approaches, a point shared by the different approaches is located and discussed in terms that show both approaches in their complicity to the problem they both differently seek to address or resolve. Bingham exemplifies this with the divergent educational theories of John Dewey and Paolo Freire, both of which, he shows, commonly presume “the unquestionable benefit to teaching itself” (2010, p. 94). While both theories offer strong but different critiques of teaching, they implicitly share a basic endorsement of teaching. The tautology is located in their shared presumption. As much as Dewey’s and Freire’s theories can be differentiated through geographical, political, and philological contexts, they presume the same claim that teaching is beneficial as a ground for their different theories. Bingham shifts tautology from the sense described above, a fallacy or truism, to a method for locating an unacknowledged common trait. More than an unnecessary repetition of the same, presumptive tautology introduces a mode of critique into discourse by identifying a complicity that can go as far as to undermine differences between theories and methods.

By figuring the work of Dewey and Freire through a shared presumption, Bingham’s work makes clear that presumptive tautologies offer a critical method of analysis in

educational theory, but what of educational practice? Szukdlarek (2019) extends from Bingham to develop a sense of tautology that performs a pedagogical role by presuming what is desired to then fulfil that desire. For instance, by wishing to “make a difference,” teachers orient their practice according to the various meanings of the difference to be made, which are both externally shaped by education policies and broader social discourses and internally through experiences of being different by virtue of having been taught (see Biesta, 2013). This latter, internal part sets “the conditions of educational practice being effective beyond that which is determined externally” (Szukdlarek, 2019, p. 430). In other words, presumptive tautologies can highlight the internal and external determinations of practice that a teacher situates and is situated by. Take, for instance, Forrest et al. (2010) discussion of the role of desire in shaping teachers’ narratives, like when a teacher implies “her desire to be the teacher she wants to become” (p.94). The authors attend to the singular nature of such narratives through the stories told by teachers, which further strengthens the importance of the internal component that teachers bring to the presumptive tautologies that motivate their work. Yet, these internal desires of teachers and teacher educators are always in relation to the external discourses that also determine what a teacher is and does.

In the following sections, I will extend these uses of external and internal to name two fronts, one articulated by education policy discourse and the other by educational research that conceptualises the reflective teacher educator. Each rely on the tautological title of the teacher educator to figure two different subjects, causal and reflective respectively. These labels of external and internal are so called because of how they position the teacher educator: external positioning involves discourses that seek to change and/or maintain teacher educators programmatically through a causal subject; internal positioning entails the work of teacher educators in terms of their individual and collective thought-practice, in the case of this article, as reflective subjects. The former populates teacher education with subjects in need of reform due to the programmatic and subjective misalignment of theory and practice. The latter peoples teacher education with reflective subjects buoyed between theory and practice. While this may appear a clean distinction, such an antagonistic front continually shifts according to the politics and desires of time and place. However, as a heuristic, my aim for this arrangement is not to reduce teacher education to a singular or dichotomous model. Instead, I seek to conceptualise a shifting terrain in an historical moment when teacher education has become a contested field between being held responsible for the failure of national school systems and enacting the educational work of teachers, both of which use tautology to motivate their claims. In this sense, the tautology of teacher education forms a politics in which the educational is at stake.

Causal tautology: teacher education on the external front of education policy and research

The focus for this section will be on education policy and research discourses in Aotearoa to exemplify the way tautology can be leveraged by think tanks and government to reform teacher education from the outside, so to speak. The primary sources are comprised of public documents, which I analyse with an eye for the way tautology is used to build an external front in the service of a causal subject. Methodologically, the analysis

follows previous work on ontological rhetorics (Carusi, 2021; Carusi & Szkudlarek, 2020, 2024), that is, a methodology based in Laclauian discourse theory and analysis (Laclau, 2005, 2014; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) that elaborates how tropes, such as metaphor or tautology, are used to bring something into being through discursive inventions and arrangements of subjects, in this case bringing the teacher educator into being through the reform of teacher education programmes.

A scan of critical research shows Aotearoa is not alone in the reforms these discourses pursue, particularly as they endorse professional standards for teachers (Heimans et al., 2024; Mayer & Mills, 2021), “best practices” (Hansen et al., 2024), “what works” (Murtagh & Dawes, 2024), and derisions of university-based programmes as too academic (Mutton & Burn, 2024). Moreover, two best evidence syntheses (Alton-Lee, 2003; Timperley et al., 2007) commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Education form the evidence base for the claim that the teacher is the most significant in-school factor in raising student achievement, making Aotearoa a site from which international teacher education reforms use evidence to support the causal linking of teachers’ work to student achievement (Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2010; Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Panel, 2022). While these international mobilisations of teacher education reform are beyond the scope of the current article, the external front developed through the following analysis can be further “externalised” for tracing the convergences and divergences of policies that locate teachers and their education as a lever to shape societies and nations.

In Aotearoa, the number of students enrolling in ITE programmes fall far below the number of teachers exiting the profession. The Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand’s annual “Snapshot of the teaching profession” (2024) surveyed over 1500+ teachers across the school sectors to find that 58% of teachers were “quite/very likely” to leave the profession within the next 5 years. Combined with a two-decade low in new ITE enrolments (Education Counts, 2024), the combination of teachers planning to leave the profession and the lack of enrolments in ITE programmes presents a problem of quantity in teacher education. Yet, the quality of teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand has recently been described as “woeful” by the current Minister of Education, Erica Stanford, who proposes a number of ITE focused reforms. She has signalled that a part of ITE’s woeful status has to do with university-based programme graduates being unprepared (Education Review Office, 2024; Walters, 2024). Her ministry is also seeking to reform the omnibus Education and Training Act of 2020 to move the establishing and maintaining of teaching standards for teacher registration from the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand to the Ministry of Education as well as placing the Ministry in charge of quality assurance and approving teacher education programmes (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2024).

These reforms are significant and far-reaching, as they entail moving ITE programmes physically outside of universities, conceptually by displacing the education of teacher education with the preparedness of teachers and definitively by relocating the authoring and evaluation of teaching standards which requires legislative changes to the Education and Training Act of 2020. How, then, does such massive change come about? To borrow from Bacchi’s WPR (What is the Problem Represented to be?) approach (Bacchi, 2009), how has teacher education become the problem that these reforms address? There are numerous threads one could trace in answering this question. For instance, we could

question the politics of evidence (Carusi et al., 2018) used by the Education Review Office (2024) to collect evidence of the lack of teacher preparedness (Carpendale & Butler, 2024; Eden & Maro, 2024). Approaches such as these that critique methodological and conceptual errors of evidence collection are invaluable to refuting poorly designed reform efforts. Differently though, the approach I take here highlights how a subject is constructed in the process of teacher education reform. How does a subject's construction, in this case the teacher educator, emerge from the problems and solutions proposed in policy reform discourses? In the case of Aotearoa teacher education, the tautological construction of the teacher educator appears through the question and title of a policy reform initiative titled "Who teaches the teachers?" (Johnston & Martin 2023).

Each of the reforms to teacher education mentioned above were first presented as recommendations in the report "Who teaches the teachers?" by the New Zealand Initiative (NZI), a self-described "public policy think tank supported by chief executives of New Zealand businesses" (2023, p.1). In this report, the tautology of teacher education is used as the overarching rationale for teacher education reform and demonstrates how policy discourse can use tautology to conceptualise teacher education.

Firstly, the title introduces tautology to cast suspicion on teacher educators. "Who teaches the teachers?" reorients Juvenal's ancient question of who guards the guardians themselves (*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*) towards teacher educators. The relevant lines read as follows:

I know the advice my old friends would give – 'Lock her up
And bar the doors.' But who is to keep guard
Over the guardians themselves? They get paid in common coin
To forget their mistress's randy little adventures;
Both sides have something to hide ((Juvenal, 1918) *Satires*, Book VI, lines 347–48).

The context of Juvenal's question is one of suspicion. The guards cannot be trusted and neither can the mistress in her sexual exploits. Since she will pay the guards to forget, both parties become complicit, which leads to a doubling of the guards and introduces an externalised tautology. "Who will guard the guardians" requires guards who will come from outside the internal corruption shared between the mistress and her guards to perform the guard function. The NZI report recalls this tautological externalisation to similarly cast suspicion on current teacher educators.

The report identifies the mode of corruption between teacher educators and teachers that requires an agency "from outside" throughout its pages. The "Foreword" warns of the corrupting influence of "cultural essentialism, identity pedagogy and constructivism" (Johnston & Martin, 2023, p. 4) in university-based ITE programmes. The anecdotal "First-hand account" recalls disappointedly an ITE experience premised on "constructivist philosophy and social justice values" (Johnston & Martin, 2023, p. 10). The "Introduction" sums these corrupting influences as "academic sociocultural theory" (Johnston & Martin, 2023, p. 14). The report presents these influences as standing guard over ITE much as Juvenal does, in order to cast suspicion on the tautology of teacher educators who are corrupted by (and therefore corrupt pre-service teachers with) "sociological perspectives" (Johnston & Martin, 2023, p. 14).

In the place of teacher educators' "ideological capture" (Johnston & Martin, 2023, p. 4), the report draws upon the "science of learning" and Hattie's *Visible Learning*

(Hattie, 2008) in support of a different teacher educator subject for Aotearoa who will see “themselves as *causal* in the learning process” (Johnston & Martin, 2023, p. 15, emphasis in original). Setting aside the fundamental error of converting explicitly correlational findings into causal models of teaching as well as the flawed uses of effect size in Hattie’s work (Simpson, 2018), the report embeds a causal model of teaching in two ways, at least. First, the report announces the change for the teacher educator, that they must understand themselves as causal. Second, the report situates the corrupt theories as what causes the bad practices of teacher educators. The marriage of corrupt theory and bad practice exhibited by teacher educators causes the production of bad teachers. Tautologically, the teacher educator causally embeds their “bad” culturalism and constructivism into their students who then become bad teachers made in the image of their teacher educator. Closing the loop of teacher educators educating teachers in their own image is the problem that the report’s recommendations seek to replace with a new subject.

Within this frame, the report makes two of three recommendations to prise out the corrupted subject made suspect by the question of who educates the educators. The first recommendation seeks to disband the Teaching Council, the organisation that registers and certifies teachers as legislated in the Education and Training Act of 2020 (ETA 2020 onwards). The report highlights the Council’s role in the corrupt tautology specifically as a problem of the subjects in place, writing that “a majority of the Teaching Council members are certificated teachers, mostly themselves trained under the predominant sociocultural approach” (Johnston & Martin 2023, p.53). After repealing the portion of the ETA 2020 that gives the Teaching Council their mandate for teacher registration and certification, the report suggests replacing them with a set of rules for forming professional bodies to certify and register teachers. By “opening” the tautology of teacher education to “competition in teacher registration and certification ... [enabling] special character education – Catholic, Kura, Montessori, etc. – to establish professional bodies reflecting their values, epistemology and pedagogy” (NZI, 2024, p. 53), the report moves the teacher educator outside of the tautology wherein (corrupted) teacher educators educate teachers. Additionally, the reformed teacher educator will be a consumer in a market of educational approaches. In such a market, values, epistemology and pedagogy are situated at the level of the certifying body to produce the teacher who represents those values. While a notion of the educational does not appear among the characteristics of teacher certifying bodies, the values, epistemology and pedagogy of marketised teacher education are decided at the level of the institutions and programmes from which prospective students, who the report consistently refers to as teachers-in-training, may choose.

The second recommendation notes the predominance of university-based ITE programmes and introduces competition as mentioned above by moving ITE programmes out of universities entirely. The report holds universities as primarily responsible for the culturalist and constructivist leanings of teacher education highlighted above. As the report clarifies, “Coursework in these [university-based ITE] programmes ... is overly sociocultural and mostly neglects teaching practice supported by scientific evidence. Indeed, some sociocultural theorists hold scientific evidence in contempt’ (NZI, 2024, p. 42). Combined with the Teaching Council, the tautology of the teacher educator becomes a system of teacher production where pre-service teachers are educated by

universities and certified by the Teaching Council to work in schools. To combat this insular loop, the report suggests teacher education programmes be moved away from universities and devolved to groups of schools to establish ITE providers. The recommendation for teaching practice supported by scientific evidence once more dislodges the educational question of teacher education in favour of a presumed scientific body of evidence dedicated to learning for teachers-in-training.

The above analysis illustrates the way the work and role of teacher educators can be situated for reform by constructing a “bad” tautology. The findings and recommendations of this NZI report has shaped teacher education reform in Aotearoa as evidenced by the current Minister of Education’s “Improved teacher training” cabinet paper (Office of the Minister of Education, 2024) wherein the Minister recommends repealing and replacing the Teaching Council’s certification and registration functions from the next iteration of the Education and Training Act and moving ITE from “theory taught in the [tertiary-led] ITE programme” (Office of the Minister of Education, 2024, p. 3) to school-based ITE programmes of work-integrated learning. By casting suspicion on teacher education through the question of who educates the educators, this report establishes an external front against what it characterises as a closed loop of constructivism and culturalism that shuts out the science of learning. Regardless of one’s support or opposition, the report renders the teacher educator through a tautology of suspicion to build a reform platform for ITE ideologically and organisationally external to the Teaching Council and university-led ITE programmes. In doing so, the question of what is educational is answered within a devolved market of teacher education where “the science of learning” will make teachers-in-training not only work-ready but optimally trained to raise student achievement.

Reflective tautology: teacher education on the internal front of thought-practice

Naming the internal front of thought-practice juxtaposes the work that teachers and especially teacher educators do as thinkers and practitioners of teaching. To the degree that teacher education is tied to state-mandated schooling, teacher educators cannot be separated completely from the reform discourses that shape how teachers are certified and the national and regional policy initiatives linked to the work of teachers described above as forming an external front. However, this is not to say teacher educators are wholly determined by state desires for reform. I use the term thought-practice here to attend to those qualities of teaching enacted through the relative autonomy of what one thinks and does as a teacher educator. This shifts attention from the external front discussed in the previous section to the internal front of the teacher educator, that is, the collective and solitary work of aiming practice, theory, description and evaluation towards the aspects of educating teachers that may or may not coincide with state reforms.

Work on the internal front concerns the processes and relations of education as they are and can be embodied by the thought-practices of teachers. There is no shortage of research and scholarship that addresses teacher educators in terms of their thought-practice given the broad definition I use here, but within the scope of tautology, the reflective teacher shines forth, so to speak. This section considers how the reflective

teacher illustrates the role tautology plays in constructing the internal front of teacher education. This is not to suggest reflective teaching is the only approach to conceptualising teacher education (see, for example, Hill, 2017; Lambert, 2021; Murriss, 2022), but its longstanding and continuing appearance across teacher education research and practice offers volumes of material for considering the tautological construction of the teacher educator.

There is more than one kind of reflection even when narrowing one's search to teacher education (Singh et al., 2019). The popular advent of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) and earlier philosophical considerations of reflection as a mode of thinking (Dewey, 2008) have spurred a broad and diverse research base on what it means to be a reflective teacher and how teacher educators can both practice reflection and explore its practice with their students who wish to become teachers (see, for example, Adler, 1991; McLaughlin, 1999; Mills & Satterthwait, 2000; Rodgers, 2002; Yost et al., 2000). In Rodgers (2020) analysis, the reflective teacher has become such a widespread figure that the term "reflective" risks being reduced and routinised into an internalised checklist of "what went well, what didn't, and what should I do next time" (p. 98). As a set of instructions, reflective thinking can undermine itself when it becomes a prescribed exercise of following rules that remain outside the view of one's reflection. Conversely, thought-practice points out the boundlessness that can also characterise reflection. As important as it is to reflect on the assumed and sedimented foundations of one's thought-practice as a teacher educator, in a reflective paradigm, there is no limit to what can be further reflected upon, a point well illustrated by the multiple approaches to reflection that Fendler (2003) characterises as a "hall of mirrors." One can fall into a *mise-en-abyme* of reflection reflecting itself infinitely, particularly when turned towards thought-practice as each of the terms, thought and practice, carries on producing more material for further reflection. From the prescriptively limited models of reflection to its endless versions, the tautology of the teacher educator arises in its reflective quality. In other words, reflection in teacher education is oriented between the poles of its limitations (reflection as a checklist) and its limitlessness (reflection reflecting itself). Tautology further conceptualises how one enacts reflective thought-practice between these seemingly contradictory poles.

To understand reflection as a tautology, the tautological formula $A = A$ can prove useful. This formula represents via mathematical notation the sentence A is A . As discussed above, some object or subject A is the same as itself. However, within the context of reflection, $A = A$ offers an identical reflection of itself. If one inserts a mirror vertically, bisecting the equal sign, the reflection is identical to the reflected; neither the A nor the equal sign appear reversed. The reflection allows the formula to be cut in half to reflect the same image making the second half excessive to the first. As a tautology, teacher educators continually reflect themselves in their thought-practice, and in doing so create a reflected and reflective self. Through a tautological concept of reflection, the teacher educator, like the first half of the formula, appears complete only when it is reflected back to itself.

This completeness is not final in any sense as the teacher educator continues to reconstruct and reencounter limits in the forms of goals, practices, ideas, happenstances, epiphanies and so on that form a changed self. As the formula is truncated by half and then doubled by the reflective mirror, the teacher educator changes and is changed,

establishing a relation between thought-practice and reflection that changes both. As the teacher educator changes their thought-practice through reflection, the reflected-self changes through their thought-practice. By virtue of reflection a teacher educator is embedded in a relational ontology wherein they work and reflect on that work to change their thought-practice. Even in the rare instances of a teacher educator engaging in reflective thought-practice alone, the reflection doubles the teacher educator in the tautological mirror, that is, the bidirectionality of the relation also is produced by the act of self-reflection. Questions of ordering the thought-practice and the reflection (e.g., which comes first? In what order?) become insignificant in such an ontology because the relation is what constitutes and continues to animate the teacher educator and their reflection. For the thought-practice of teacher educators characterised by the reflective tautology, the poles of the checklist and the *mise-en-abyme* matter less as they are temporary stations that one may or may not identify as a “starting point.” More important to reflection is its role as relation; its limits and infinities will vary regardless and continuously.

With this tautological conceptualisation of reflection in teacher education sketched, the internal front of thought-practice remains to be discussed. Whereas above an external front is constructed through the suspicion cast on those who educate the educators, within the thought-practice of teacher education, an internal front is created according to the reflective work of teaching. The tautology of reflection enables teacher educators to imagine, symbolise, direct and make manifest the teacher, the educator and the teacher educator through their thought-practice. Understanding this as the production of an internal front relies on the relation between tautological reflection and the thought-practice of teacher educators (and teachers more generally).

Teacher educators engaging in reflection re-create a figure of the teacher through their thought-practices developed through personal and collaborative experiences. Reflection names a process through which teacher educators conceive a self (divided, whole, complete or incomplete) that directs further action at themselves as well as their students. In this sense, the reflective teacher enacts in thought-practice what Biesta (2023) has described as the educational purpose of subjectification, namely, to make one the subject of their own life. Mills and Satterthwait (2000) exemplify the change that reflection can produce in pre-service teachers’ conceptions of self in terms of how they wish to be seen as professionals rather than as student teachers. This represents a single shift of self, from student to professional. Rodgers (2020) expands this dramatically in her analysis and expansion of an “I-Thou-It” model (Hawkins, 2002) where each of the terms holds multiple figures that emerge via the reflective relations between each. The teacher as I, the student as Thou, and the subject matter as It offers one figuration, but Rodgers (2020) quickly shows that the teacher becomes student, the student becomes teacher, the subject matter becomes world, each of these figures further transforming according to the dynamism of the reflective relations between each. As each term changes in relation to the other, Rodgers (2020) offers further emphasis to the many subjects involved in the educational work of teaching.

The difference between teacher and educator for the reflective teacher educator is located in the process of splitting that reflection enables. While these figures form and change across time, space, and experience, the doubling that reflection produces links teacher educators to images and concepts that bear upon themselves and others

specifically as teachers. As mentioned above regarding the poles of reflection, the definitional differences between teacher and educator matters less than the relation maintained between them. At the level of tautology, the reflective relation made with the mirror maintains the division between terms rather than collapsing them into one. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the reflective tautology produces a shifting identity undulating between the teacher and the educator, and, recalling the reflected $A = A$ image, there is nothing on the other side of the teacher educator. By virtue of the relation, there is no final destination for the teacher educator awaiting on either side, no transcendental promise of arrival at the one true and universal teacher. Instead, the teacher and educator become the poles between which reflective tautology inscribes an internal front of thought and practice, alone and with others, of the teacher educator (or educator teacher).

As a reflective relation, teacher educators can construct their work primarily in reference to their own and others' thought-practices of teaching. Reflection in teacher education allows for a focus on what constitutes teaching alongside the assumptions, intentions, and inventions of one's thought-practice independently from policy initiatives. This is not to say policy initiatives are necessarily incapable of supporting the thought-practices of reflective teacher educators. However, causal discourses are unlikely to offer much support. The reflective work of teacher educators to keep open questions of what makes teaching educational is eclipsed by the universal teacher produced and evidenced through measurable outcomes, primarily as test scores on standardised tests (Biesta, 2010; Carusi & Niwa, 2020). The tautologies of the teacher educator between causation and reflection turn on the question of what is educational about teacher education. More than conceptual, this question becomes political to the degree that each front positions the teacher educator in relation to the subject they seek to form.

A politics of the educational in teacher education

The internal and external fronts of teacher education discussed above both work tautologically but with different assumptions and aims. The question of who educates the educator maintains a difference between teachers and educators to generate suspicion and promote a causal figure of the teacher which includes the discursive shift from teacher education towards the "science of learning" for "teachers-in-training." Separately, the doubling of reflection spurs a constitutive relation between teacher and educator, a relation that maintains enough of a difference for each term to reflect the other. While tautology is a key structure for both discourses, their differences build a politics of the profession that hinges on the differing horizons each discourse orients towards education.

What does it mean to locate the teacher educator as a site of politics in horizontal terms? The role of the horizon is vital to political formations to the degree that it acts as a screen in the distance that discourses can project a fulfilled future of present demands. I draw this configuration from the "impossibility of society" developed in Laclau's political theory (Laclau, 1983). Society is an ontologically impossible yet politically necessary term, what Laclau (1996) calls a signifier without a signified or an empty signifier. As an empty signifier, society is unable to fully reconcile itself as an object or subject wherein all demands of those who populate the society-in-view are

satisfied. Said differently, there is no signified that corresponds to the signifier “society.” Instead, society names a horizon that represents the demands of political movements. As such, society as an empty signifier can address both contemporary society as lacking and future society as complete in terms of satisfying the demands of its people. Thus, attempts to constitute an envisioned society fail to arrive at its “always receding horizon” (Laclau, 1996, p. 34), yet these attempts are the occurrence of politics which constitute the social. Rather than a society fully reconciled with the fulfilment of political demands, political movements generate the social, that is, in missing the culmination of society what politics produces instead is the social. It is in this sense that the positioning of the teacher educator described above generates the educational. What Laclau describes as the political genesis of the social from society, represents for my argument the political genesis of the educational from education, specifically teacher education.

Both discourses analysed above articulate a horizon of education, and in so doing, instead form the educational. This sense of the educational differs from notions of the educational that seek what is proper to education, what belongs to education-in-itself, and autotelic notions of education for its own sake. While each of these approaches to the educational are distinct from one another, they share in their conceptualisations a limit that demarcates what is or can be included as properly educational and what cannot (Carusi & Szkudlarek, 2024). The approach I take here conceptualises education as an empty signifier that orients all discourses that make use of it. In this sense, education is porous, contaminable and without an essence or in-itself. Education is only ever improper, promiscuous even, as it appears in education policy, theory and practice heterogeneously with no one field or subfield able to shore up the boundaries of education such that it remains itself. What education *is* (the ontological) shifts according to the discourses that seek to conceptualise and instrumentalise education towards various ends including itself (Atif, 2024). Not only do these particular attempts continually change what education is, making education impossible as a stable essence, but the educational is what emerges from these efforts. Taking this latter half in terms of political necessity, the educational becomes an historical term that philosophers, politicians, educationists, and others have used to variously describe the human, the State, and the many subjects and actions required to arrive at countless, ever-receding horizons of education.

The political necessity and ontological impossibility of education that generates the educational acknowledges both discourses in the above analysis as formulations of the educational that focus on the teacher educator as a subject who embodies the horizon of education set by each. The external tautology views the teacher as causal to learning. Emblematic of the vanishing point of the horizon is the infinite regress of guards guarding guards: the teacher educator is causal to teacher learning, and the policy reforms are viewed as causal to teacher educators, i.e., the suggested reforms will cause the desired changes in teacher educators. The logic and evidence of these causal assumptions are flawed, as highlighted above, but for this concluding section, the figuring of the relationship takes precedence over its correctness. As a causal relation where teaching causes learning and policy causes desired changes in teacher educators, the relationship is repeatedly configured in a single direction from cause to effect. The causal agent determines some change that leads to a desired effect that will serve as a new cause: Policy will cause teacher educators to cause teachers-in-training to cause learning. The horizon of

education is brought closer with the tautological question of who educates the educator, because through this question the corruption of the teacher educator by socio-cultural theory is excised and replaced with a subject who acts in accordance with the science of learning. The educational facet of this discourse, that is the attempt to arrive at the horizon of education, gains its motility by embedding the teacher educator into a causal process of learning.

The internal front analysed above presents another rendering of the tautological character of the teacher educator. The horizon of education draws the teacher and the educator ever closer but never entirely identified with one another. The poles of the teacher and the educator become important according to how they are constituted by their reflective relation. Within the internal front, the shifting coordinates of reflection emphasise the reflective relation over the subjects and/or objects at either end or encircled by the relation. The teacher and the educator become significant as they each change through their reflective relation. The changing character of the teacher and the educator through their reflective thought-practice prevents any stable definitions and natures from gaining purchase on the teacher educator. Instead, the relation between teacher and educator comes into focus as reflective. There is no fixed or final point of arrival for the teacher educator, and through the relation the teacher educator gains their status as a reflective (and reflected) subject. Through the various approaches to reflection, from checklist to hall of mirrors, the horizon of education becomes a reflective, rather than causal, relation approximated but never secured by the thought-practice of the reflective teacher educator. Each attempt at defining reflection offers another instance of the educational as they position the teacher educator through reflective practices and conceptual arrangements. Some attempts can undermine reflection while other can fall into an infinity of reflected reflections.

There are various attempts within each discourse that promise to draw its subjects towards the horizon of education, and these efforts constitute a politics of teacher education. What I argue is that the teacher educator is a primary site of constituting a politics of education, and this politics is inseparable from the conceptualisations of the teacher educator in policy and research discourses. To return to the challenges introduced at the beginning of the paper with the arguments above in view, a "politically astute conception of education" becomes tautological as conceptions of education and teacher education are already political to the degree that the discourses analysed engage in a politics through their horizon of education drawn closer through causal and reflective subjects. These two discourses are not the only political attempts directed towards the empty signifier of education, yet their prominence in State-led and research-led discourses offers a broad example of how the teacher educator emerges as a subject who acts in accordance with different horizons of education. Through such a conceptual mapping, the "cognitive jurisdiction" of the teacher educator changes according to the discourse. A reflective teacher educator is tied closely to reflective thought-practice, thus their thinking offers a wide authority to practice and vice-versa. A causal teacher educator has a reduced jurisdiction as the primary authority is the science of learning, at least within contemporary policy discourses of Aotearoa. Each discourse engenders a different terrain to be mapped, further emphasising the unavoidable political dimension of conceptualising the teacher educator. And finally, to "make the case for an educational conception of education," one returns to the beginning, as tautologies do. The

tautological formulation of an educational conception of education looks very different, even opposed, between the two discourses analysed here. However, they both offer an educational conception of education through their attempts at drawing the teacher educator closer to their respective horizons of education. This is not to place education into a nihilistic relativism, i.e., that education is ontologically meaningless, but instead to emphasise the particularities of education and the educational, and these particularities entail a politics each time. Education is ontologically impossible and politically necessary to spark the educational. An educational conception of education is a precise (and tautological) confirmation of the political register that accompanies each horizon of education.

Notes

1. Aotearoa is the indigenous name of the land that was later colonised and named New Zealand. I will refer to Aotearoa in all following instances except when referring to titles in organisations and documents that maintain the colonial name of New Zealand.
2. The names associated with methods and their particularity are central concerns for Bingham (2010) and well worth further consideration in discussions of educational methods and methodologies, though this article will focus more closely on the use of tautology.

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Notes on contributor

F. Tony Carusi is a Senior Lecturer of Educational Studies in the Institute of Education, Massey University Aotearoa. Tony's work looks at the commonsensical, unquestioned routines and practices within the field of education, from pedagogy to policy-making, and the historically-situated, discursive processes whereby these routines and practices persist, particularly involving those processes that appear natural in spite of critical resistance efforts.

ORCID

F. Tony Carusi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9568-0736>

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