

Abstract

The Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) project *Shifting conceptualisations of knowledge and learning in the integration of the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) in teacher education* generated a collection of eight case studies. The case studies describe individual teacher educators' personal journeys as they engaged with ideas relating to epistemological understandings and the NZC and undertook practitioner research in relation to their work with student teachers in initial teacher education (ITE) and practising teachers in schools. The findings of the case studies are synthesised using a meta-ethnography methodology. Consistent with the post-structural philosophical underpinnings of the project, which recognise that there are multiple ways of knowing and that different ways of knowing provide different insights and explanations, the meta-ethnography has been conducted from dual perspectives. Interpretive and post-structural analyses provide different and complementary understandings of the case studies and what can be learned from these.

The interpretive analysis suggests that epistemological shifts experienced by participants were complex, but that the nature of the participants' epistemological shifts was towards more relativist understandings of knowledge, learning and curriculum. This move was towards seeing knowledge, learning and curriculum as subjective, culturally and socially constructed, and contestable. The NZC was understood by teacher educators as a lever that could be used to advance social justice agendas, and by student teachers and teachers as supporting personal development and equity goals for learners. Teacher educators made sense of their shifting epistemological understandings and the personal challenges that these provoked through the metaphor of a journey. The post structural analysis suggests that educators' participating in the study continually framed and reframed their conceptualisations of knowledge, learning and curriculum in line with their current and emerging personal and professional identities and interests, relating to who they are and who they want to become. It also suggests that the teacher educators' and, to some extent, the student teachers', teachers' and school leaders' engagements in the project enabled them to resignify meanings of curriculum and of 'shifting' epistemological understandings. Given the intertwined nature of personal and professional identities, epistemological and ontological shifts for the participants involved dissonance, uncertainty and crisis. Over the duration of the project there was a move from seeing the NZC as a document to be implemented, towards seeing curriculum as a site of contested knowledges that could be strategically engaged with as a tool for social transformation. Resignifying the curriculum brought many participants into conflict with dominant understandings of the ways in which their roles as knowers are constituted in institutional and wider national policy discourses. These findings and specific strategies that supported participants' epistemological thinking and critical engagement with curriculum are elaborated in the meta-ethnography.