



Tensions and possibilities in teacher educators' roles and professional development

This first issue of Volume 41 of EJTE is devoted to a key topic in teacher education: the professional roles and development of teacher educators. As I stressed in my first editorial (Flores 2017) much has been written on teacher education, but less is known about the identity, working contexts and professional learning of teacher educators, despite the growing interest about the topic in the last years. The need to better understand who teacher educators are and what they do, how they understand their roles and their professional development but also how they see themselves as teacher educators has been widely advocated (see, for instance, Izadinia 2014; Livingston 2014; Flores 2016; Czerniawski, MacPhail, and Guberman 2017). Teacher educators' identity, their professional learning needs throughout their careers and their working contexts have been seen as key elements that deserve further attention in order to overcome the idea of teacher educators as hidden or unrecognised professionals (Livingston 2014) and to shed light on the invisibility of their work (Flores 2016). The need to make the work of teacher educators more explicit and visible within institutions in order to enhance the status of teacher education in academia has also been highlighted. Issues such as diversity, complexity, multidimensionality (and sometimes ambiguity) have been used to explain the characteristics of teacher educators' work.

This volume includes eight articles that reflect the increasing attention to teacher educators' work and professional development. They come from researchers in different countries such as Belgium, Canada, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, and Trinidad and Tobago. All of them address, in one way or another, the complex, dynamic and changing nature of teacher educators' professional roles and their professional development. They reflect the trajectories of what it means to become and be a teacher educator. They look at the tensions in teacher educators' professional working contexts and the frictions in their practices. They also highlight the role of teacher educators as curriculum developers and the critical moments in their professional development and change. The need to look at their professional agenda and analyse the framework in which they draw their professional practice along with a call for action is also discussed.

This issue begins with a paper by Tom Russell, from Canada, entitled 'A Teacher Educator's Lessons Learned from Reflective Practice'. The article is based on a personal reflective journey of 40 years as a teacher educator. Starting with a brief description of his background and context, Russell identifies a number of key questions that are of relevance for teacher educators. These include, amongst other features, issues about the process of becoming and thinking like a teacher as well as learning from experience and metacognition. The author, then, situates his reflection within the self-study perspective, which implies a self-initiated, focused and interactive process as it addresses his own practices as a teacher educator. Russell draws a distinction between critical reflection and reflective practice; the former is related to 'the familiar epistemology of the university'; the latter 'embraces the epistemology of professional practice, which is essentially foreign and unfamiliar to those learning to teach'. The author identifies a number of key issues based on the self-study of his professional learning as a teacher educator that are useful for teacher educators more generally examining their role and practices.

In a similar vein, Wil Meeus, Wouter Cools and Inge Placklé discuss the professional roles of teacher educators in Belgium in their paper 'Teacher educators developing professional roles:

frictions between current and optimal practices'. Based on existing literature, the authors discuss the professional roles of teacher educators. They draw on empirical work carried out with teacher educators by means of a survey and focus group. Meeus, Cools and Placklé concluded that, in general, attention has been paid by teacher educators to their professional learning and that they are able to meet their needs taking into account the wide range of existing courses and programmes available for them. However, they warn that there is a need for a better alignment of professional learning with the needs and career stages of teacher educators.

Teacher educators' professional roles are also the focus of attention of the third paper 'Teacher educators as curriculum developers: exploration of a professional role', by Marina Bouckaert and Quinta Kools, from the Netherlands. Drawing on existing literature on teacher educators' professional roles, the authors report on a mixed-method exploratory study carried out in a large teacher education department in a Dutch university of applied sciences. Bouckaert and Kools conclude that the participants consider themselves to be curriculum developers and are aware of the scope and responsibilities of their role. Issues of teacher educators' preparation and professional development for their role as curriculum developers were highlighted namely in what concerns informal learning with colleagues in the workplace.

Professional learning, development and change of teacher educators in Israel are also addressed in the fourth paper 'Critical moments in the process of educational change: understanding the dynamics of change among teacher educators' by David Brody and Linor Lea Hadar. It draws on the storyline methodology to investigate the ways in which teacher educators look at innovative pedagogy within a professional development opportunity. The authors state that the participants identified critical moments in their professional development which were associated with evaluation of feedback from colleagues and students. Brody and Hadar argue that teacher educators' professional growth is dependent on the interaction and negotiation of meaning within the professional development community but also on the effects of the messages they received from colleagues and students.

Similarly, in the fifth paper 'Tensions in the work context of teacher educators in a School of Education in Trinidad and Tobago: a case study', Jennifer Yamin-Ali looks at the perspectives of university-based teacher educators about their roles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 21 teacher educators participating in the same programme and institution. Yamin-Ali concludes that there were tensions between the participants' own expectations of the position they were employed for and their perspectives of the institutions' requirements in regard to them. In particular, the participants point to an expansion of their roles which included tasks and activities beyond teaching. Added to this were issues related to the challenge to carry out and publish empirical research, the lack of support through a team approach and the scarcity of professional development opportunities.

The sixth paper included in this issue also focuses on teacher educators' professional development. Hanne Tack, Martin Valcke, Isabel Rots, Katrien Struyven and Ruben Vanderlinde, in their paper 'Uncovering a hidden professional agenda for teacher educators: A mixed method study on Flemish teacher educators and their professional development', look at the needs and opportunities of teacher educators in terms of their professional development. The authors draw on a large-scale survey with 611 teacher educators and on five focus group with 24 participants. Findings point to what the authors describe as a structural need for teacher educators' participation in professional development activities that are closely linked to their own practices and organised within the context of long-term perspective. The authors argue for the need to invest in a professional development agenda for research, policy and practice focusing on teacher educators' professional development.

Similarly, Clare Kosnik, Lydia Menna, Pooja Dharamshi and Clive Beck, in the seventh paper, 'Constructivism as a framework for literacy teacher education courses: the cases of six literacy teacher educators', present findings from research which included 28 literacy/English teacher

educators from four countries. Drawing on constructivism as a theoretical framework, the authors describe in their paper data from six teacher educators who used a constructivist approach in their courses. Kosnik et al. discuss the findings of their study focusing on three aspects of constructivism: knowledge is constructed by learners; knowledge is experience-based; and a strong class community is essential. The views of teacher educators were examined including their conceptualisation of the teaching/learning process, seen as a partnership. Amongst other features were an inquiry orientation, modelling, building on prior experience and connecting theory and practice. The authors conclude their paper by highlighting the demanding, fluid and flexible nature of constructivism. The need for courses to be organic in order to foster the discussion of issues was also highlighted.

In the final paper, 'Towards an "international forum for teacher educator development": an agenda for research and action', Geert Kelchtermans, Kari Smith and Ruben Vanderlinde focus on teacher educators' professional development drawing on an international collaborative project involving researchers and teacher educators from eight countries. The authors discuss the need for investing in teacher educators' professional development from a practice, policy and research perspective. They present a model to conceptualise teacher educators' professional development based on the international project in which they have been involved as well as on existing international literature on the topic. Kelchtermans, Smith and Vanderlinde draw attention to the complexities of teacher educators' professional development and they describe and justify the setting-up of the International Forum for Teacher Educator Development.

Each of these papers highlights the complexity, diversity and uniqueness of teacher educators' work, identity and professional development. Drawing upon different contexts and perspectives, they illustrate the tensions in their working contexts and in their professional roles but they also provide the readers with some possibilities for promoting their professional learning and development in a variety of ways. The need to invest more in a comprehensive, coherent and relevant strategy for teacher educators' professional development is also advocated taking into account a policy, practice and research perspective.

References

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