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Collaborative teacher educator professional development in Europe: different voices, one goal

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In this article we present an embedded case study focused on the learning activities provided for and by us through our involvement in an international forum focused on the professional development of teacher educators. The aim of this research was to gain more insight into the complicated processes of professional learning across national borders. Data included personal narratives about learning and documentary analysis of written accounts of the forums' activities. Following a collaborative self-study approach we utilised an interactive exploration of the data, using coding techniques derived from grounded theory. We conclude that our professional learning can be seen through two inter-related perspectives. The first perspective is the interplay between our own learning and the ways in which we want to support colleagues in their professional development. The second perspective is the reciprocal effect of working in national as well as in transnational contexts. By studying our professional learning processes we developed insights into how a shared communal international forum can be established without losing individual voices and national perspectives. Moreover, through our involvement in an international forum we also continue to develop our own self-understanding as 'educators of teacher educators'.

Keywords: teacher educator; professional learning; international community; European teacher education

1. Introduction

The links between reform of teacher education programmes and improvements in the quality of schooling have become an accepted – and often unproblematised – part of international discourses of education in the last 10 years. Consequently, policy documents often emphasise the importance of changes to many of the structures of both pre-service and in-service teacher education. More recently, the importance of teacher educators themselves in such reforms has also been recognised. For example, a pan-European report – 'Supporting Teacher Educators for Better Learning Outcomes' (European Commission 2013) – identifies the centrality of well-prepared and well-supported teacher educators in school improvement, and emphasises the need for systematic and sustained professional learning opportunities

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to be provided for them. Here this policy document echoes long-held professional opinions that teacher educators are the ‘linchpins in educational reforms’ (Cochran-Smith 2003, p. 3), and that, as an occupational group, they need more coherent and extensive professional development (Lunenberg *et al.* 2014).

Research shows that the availability of a national frame of reference helps teacher educators to focus their learning and identify their professional development needs (Murray 2008, Koster and Dengerink 2008, Byrd *et al.* 2011). As a result of such research, there are a growing number of studies and guidelines which identify specific professional learning designs for various ‘stages’ of working as a teacher educator; here provision for those entering teacher education work often features strongly (see, for example, Boyd *et al.* 2011, Kosnik *et al.* 2011, Smith 2011). For more experienced teacher educators teaching students or serving teachers, professional learning frameworks often encourage the articulation of practice, particularly pedagogical practice (see Dengerink *et al.* [2015] on the standards of the Dutch Association of Teacher Educators (VELON)). But there are very few studies which identify what professional learning might look like for experienced teacher educators who are involved in researching, leading and teaching the professional learning of other teacher educators. In other words, what does learning look like for the educators of the teacher educators?

As the authors of this article we are all in the position of being such educators. In our four different European countries – Belgium (Flanders), England, the Netherlands and Norway – we have each developed initiatives to support the professional development of teacher educators nationally, carried out research on the occupational group and tried to speak out to influence our respective policy-makers and governments. All of us have also worked on these issues in transnational contexts. In this article, we focus on the learning activities provided for and by us through our involvement in a transnational forum, the International Forum for Teacher Educator Development (InFo-TED). We have long been interested in the potential of teacher educators’ learning across and within different European contexts. In many ways our interests start from what Michael Schratz (2014, p. 2) calls ‘raising awareness for a new expectation of what constitutes a European teacher i.e. a teacher working within a European context of professionalism’; our own agenda adapts this call to focus on the idea of what might constitute a European teacher educator and the professional learning she/he might need to operate effectively in both national and transnational contexts.

2. Understanding teacher educators’ professional development

In the last two decades, knowledge about the professional development of teacher educators has grown. Studies about the teacher educator as ‘second order practitioner’ (Murray 2002) or ‘teacher of teachers’ (Loughran 2006, Swennen *et al.* 2010) have clarified that the work of teacher educators has to be distinguished from the work of teachers, and requests its own ‘pedagogy of teacher education’ (Loughran 2006). Teacher educators, however, are not only teachers of teachers, they also fulfill other roles, such as curriculum developer (Korthagen *et al.* 2006, Grossman *et al.* 2009), researcher (Murray and Male 2005, Lunenberg *et al.* 2014) and gatekeeper (Smith 2007, Tillema and Smith 2007, Granberg 2010). These roles require specific knowledge.

As already indicated, national frames of reference are clearly important in professional development and several associations of teacher educators have developed such a framework (see, for example, the Association of Teacher Educator [ATE] in the USA, VELON in the Netherlands and the Flemish Association of Teacher Educators [VELOV] in Belgium). An essential characteristic these frames of reference have in common is that they function as ‘guideposts’ for professional development and not as tick lists. Also important is that teacher educators experience a supportive environment when working on their professional development (Van Velzen *et al.* 2010, Gemmell *et al.* 2010). Other authors, among them Wood and Geddis (1999), Dinkelman (2003) and Zeichner (2007), point to the findings that studying one’s practice is an excellent way for teacher educators to systematically reflect on and improve their practices, and thus engage in practice-oriented research. Studies also show, however, that teacher educators often need support to conduct research, specifically to develop methodological competences. They want to belong to a research community, and to have protected time for research and access to the necessary financial resources to support their development (Murray 2008, Gemmell, *et al.* 2010).

Another aspect of teacher educators’ professional development that receives increasing attention in research studies is the shift towards school-based teacher education, which – although in different forms and timeframes – takes place in many countries. Such a shift requires school-based teacher educators to become more than local guides giving practical suggestions to student-teachers. They have to learn to stimulate deep reflection and to theoretically underpin their own and their students’ work (Crasborn *et al.* 2011).

The broad variety of types of teacher educators, of roles and tasks of teacher educators, and the variety of contexts they are working in require tailored paths for teacher educators’ professional development. The recognition of the life-history and career trajectory of those entering the profession of teacher education – often involving a change of professional identity in mid-career – is also typical for the profession of teacher educators and should be taken into account (Lunenberg and Hamilton 2008).

Studies show that the majority of professional development for teacher educators occurs through forms of workplace learning (Lunenberg and Hamilton 2008, Boyd *et al.* 2011). The term ‘learning architecture’, drawn from the field of workplace learning, is therefore useful to draw upon when discussing teacher educators’ learning. The term identifies the array of components that underpin and determine the final form of the learning activities which take place within a group – and which often determine the quality of the learning achieved. According to Tummons (2014, p.121) these components are diverse and may include things such as places (e.g. rooms), equipment (e.g. reading materials) and structures (e.g. group presentations). To Tummons’ list we would add the various forms of professional capital and interest which the participating members bring to the group. We would also note that any learning architecture is necessarily informed by the group’s mission and values, including any identified learning strategies or needs.

Several studies stress the importance of creating learning paths that fit personal qualities, such as openness to new ideas and eagerness to learn (Silova *et al.* 2010), and to recognise and fill in gaps in prior knowledge and experience, for example organising one’s own time and making use of students’ feedback (Dinkelman *et al.* 2006, Byrd *et al.* 2011). Only such tailored pathways can help teacher educators to

develop a coherent professional identity, and to overcome what Ducharme (1993, p. 4) described as the sometimes seemingly ‘Janus-like’ and ‘schizophrenic’ situation. He continues by saying that teacher educators even seem to have more than two faces: ‘School person, scholar, researcher, methodologist, and visitor to a strange planet’ (1993, p. 6). Smith (2011) calls this the ‘multifaceted teacher educator’.

According to Conway (2001), the development of a professional identity is embedded in a process of interpretation and re-interpretation. It is an ongoing process, dynamic, and not static. This concurs with Kelchtermans’ view of defining professional identity as self-understanding:

The term ‘self-understanding’ refers to both the understanding one has of one’s ‘self’ at a certain moment in time (*product*), as well as to the fact that this product results from an ongoing *process* of making sense of one’s experiences and their impact on the ‘self’. (Kelchtermans 2009, p. 261; original emphases)

3. Context

3.1. National contexts

In all European countries, including ours, the consciousness that teacher educators need specific and tailored professional development provision is still not shared by all educators, the institutions in which they work, their governments and other stakeholders, and professional development with regard to both research and practice needs more attention. In Norway, thanks to the Norwegian National Research School in Teacher Education (NAFOL), the research development of teacher educators has been promoted intensively in the last few years, but knowledge of school practice has received less attention for higher education-based educators. In Flanders and the Netherlands, national frames of reference help to focus the pedagogical development of teacher educators, but only small-scale initiatives to further develop teacher educators’ quality with regard to theory, research and practice have been undertaken. While the shift from institution-based to school-based teacher education is ongoing in many European countries, sustained and systematic professional development opportunities for school-based teacher educators are often scarce (Boei *et al.* 2015). In Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands the national governments increasingly take on responsibility for some professional development activities, including financing some initiatives such as NAFOL in Norway and more systematic professional accreditation in the Netherlands on a project-by-project and time-limited basis. In England there have been no such government initiatives. The relationship between the occupational group of teacher educators and the government also needs particular attention in England, although the situation is more complicated there, not least because the responsibility for teacher educator’s professional development has long been devolved to the employing institutions in an increasingly fragmented system.

3.2. International Forum for Teacher Educator Development

The InFo-TED group was established by the authors of this article in 2013 with a specific mission to bring together, exchange and promote research, policy and practice related to teacher educators’ professional development. Colleagues from Scotland and Ireland joined the group in 2014, as well as representatives from Israel, the USA and Australia. In order to achieve its mission, the group also aims to develop

the professional identities and knowledge bases of all those who educate teachers and teacher educators. To date, the group has developed a conceptual model for the professional development of teacher educators, designed and carried out an international survey on the needs of teacher educators, presented at national and international conferences, written several papers and prepared a funding proposal for the European Commission. In the short term, the group has two main focuses: to develop interactive and inclusive resources to form a pan-European e-learning portal; and to create an InFo-TED Summer Academy for European teacher educators. The underlying rationale here, of course, is to contribute to European policy and practice agendas and to advance the quality of teacher education across Europe. InFo-TED meets twice a year as a group, and in between the members meet at international conferences. To date, members of InFo-TED have all self-funded the group's activities, but – as already mentioned – a proposal for additional funding has been submitted to the European Commission.

Since its establishment members of the forum have engaged in activities which are here seen as learning opportunities or 'learning affordances' (Billett 2001) for us; that is, these activities were the designs and devices which enabled high-quality learning, closely related to our professional workplaces, to occur. Committed to the idea of engagement in our own ongoing professional learning, we seek to identify what forms high-quality learning might take for us as we engage in the group. We characterise the research design we use here to explore our own learning as an embedded case study (Yin 2002), where the case is our professional learning embedded within broader contexts of the activities conducted by a larger group of teacher educators. The specific aim of this research study is to draw on the results of that analysis to contribute to more insights into the complicated processes of professional learning and development for the educators of teacher educators, particularly while working 'across national borders'.

4. Methods

The aim of this research is to gain more insight into the complicated processes of professional learning across national borders. We have long been interested in the potential of teacher educators' learning across and within different European contexts.

The aim of this research was to investigate and analyse the professional learning which we gained through our participation in the InFo-TED group.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What did we learn from our participation in the InFo-TED group and its activities?
2. What 'learning architectures' and activities facilitated our professional learning and the growth of our self-understanding?

This study combines aspects of self-study and qualitative methodologies, particularly documentary analysis, to create a research design characterised as an embedded case study (Yin 2002). Here the case is the professional learning of the four authors embedded within the broader contexts of the activities conducted by a larger group of teacher educators devising and implementing the InFo-TED project as a pan-European initiative.

Data collection methods included the production of personal narratives about learning by the four authors and the collection of documents related to the whole group's activities (including data such as discussion papers, outlines of activities, the detailed minutes of InFo-TED meetings, presentations from national and international conferences, and the emerging body of publications from the group). Each of these data sources generated particular types of data for particular purposes to inform and develop the case study. The narratives each of the authors wrote were focused on identifying and reflecting on our personal learning when engaging in the group's activities. It is important to note here that, as group members, we were involved in the active design, development and evaluation of these activities, as well as being (self-)positioned as learners. Further pieces of writing identified the challenges we felt – within our national contexts – in supporting our teacher educator colleagues' professional development. To help us understand our four different contexts, we also wrote and discussed narratives about the factors influencing teacher educators' professional learning in each country; that is, the current 'state of play' in terms of provision and likely future developments. Table 1 shows an overview of data and analysis.

The minutes of the meetings and other documents were analysed to look at patterns of participation across the group during its meetings and to look at the types and focuses of contributions. In this way, we were able to map the characteristics of the learning environment. To analyse narratives, one of the authors took the lead to analyse the individual narratives, focusing on those issues that had evoked learning by the authors. Next the analysis was shared with the other authors, and discussed until agreement was reached. As we will discuss in the following, two important contributions to our learning proved to be the development of a conceptual model (i.e. a shared language) and discussing the development of an international survey. The data extracts from the narratives which we use in this article to illustrate our

Table 1. Researching the learning from InFo-TED's activities.

Activities undertaken by the InFo-TED group	Data sources used for the study	Data analysis methods used for the study
Evolving a shared language for European teacher education	Documents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion papers • Outlines of activities • Minutes of InFo-TED meetings 	Documentary analysis (patterns of participation)
Developing a conceptual model of teacher educators' learning		Content analysis
Developing and conducting an international survey of teacher educators' professional learning needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations from conferences • (Draft) Publications 	
Collaborative writing of conference papers, articles and book chapters	Narratives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal learning within InFo-TED 	Collaborative self-study analysis methods
Writing a proposal for European funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors and challenges with concern for supporting colleagues in own countries 	
Organising international scientific symposia		

points are attributed to individuals using the initials of each author (J.M., Jean Murray; M.L., Mieke Lunenberg; K.S., Kari Smith; R.V., Ruben Vanderlinde).

Samaras (2011) characterises the use of personal narratives in such research methods as ‘personal situated inquiry’. According to Bullough and Pinnegar (2004), this and similar methods ‘demands a deep moral commitment to inquire that connects the past in the present to imagine a new figure in the concrete reality’ (Bullough and Pinnegar 2004, p. 325). Following a collaborative self-study approach to analyse these texts, the four authors utilised an interactive exploration of the narratives and some of the other documentation, using coding techniques derived from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998, Corbin and Strauss 2008). Davey and Ham (2009) identify that by using a collaborative self-study approach like this, the potential for ‘collective wisdom’ can be gained. Based on the shared analysis of these narratives, some of the findings were shared with colleagues in a roundtable discussion at the European Educational Research Association conference in Porto in 2014. Here the authors’ thinking was articulated and critical feedback from the public was requested (Breslin *et al.* 2008, Samaras 2011). This roundtable discussion helped us to ‘see a situation through others’ eyes’ (LaBoskey 2004, p. 847) and also aimed to add to the rigour and trustworthiness of the analysis.

5. Developing professional learning through communal engagement

In this section and based on our analysis, we firstly report what characterises the InFo-Ted group as a learning environment. Next we focus on two important learning themes that appeared from our analysis: professional learning through developing a conceptual model; and professional learning by discussing the development of an international survey. Finally we conclude this section by summarising our learning.

5.1. Creating the learning environment

Our joint analysis shows that the basic organisational structures of Info-TED as a group have been important in facilitating high-quality learning; in a sense these structures have become the ‘architecture’ which creates an effective learning environment. We define such an environment as one where open communication can take place as the precursor to individual and collaborative learning. The initial membership of the group was deliberately mixed, consisting of established and much newer teacher educators, all of whom were researchers and many of whom were powerful voices in teacher education in their respective nations. Given the different positioning of individuals within the group, we strove to establish a non-hierarchical and flexible group structure in which open discussions were encouraged and differences of opinion were respected. Analysis of the participation patterns within the detailed minutes show all individuals present at the meetings contributing to debates, with lengthy discussions emerging and key challenges being discussed repeatedly over time.

Content analysis of the various documents produced by the group also shows participation patterns and emerging ways of working. These sometimes acknowledge – and even bow to – the limitations or challenges imposed by national contexts. At other times they challenge deep-rooted assumptions about the organisation of teacher education and the subsequent implications for teacher educators’ work and professional development. Together these features seem to have contributed to a vibrant,

viable and sustainable learning community with an internal culture of critical collaborative inquiry in which diversity, openness and responsiveness are encouraged and power relations are minimised as far as possible. Overall, our analysis of the working environment of the group seems to indicate the emergence of ‘practices that help to use “diversity” as a resource’ and to create an organisational ‘framework for dealing with heterogeneity’ (Schratz 2014, p. 15).

5.2. Professional learning through developing a conceptual model

At an early stage of InFo-TED’s evolution it became apparent that we needed to develop some form of shared understanding about teacher educators’ professional development and a common language for further work. As one of us (R.V.) noted in a narrative, ‘moving from national projects and initiatives to European/international activities compels us to speak a shared language’. Although all group discussions were conducted in English, understanding the different ‘languages’ and terms we used in describing our various teacher education systems was an obvious step here: what – and who – did the term ‘teacher educator’ signify? Who ‘claimed’ this term? Where were those teacher educators likely to conduct the majority of their work? What recruitment criteria were in use and why? How was professional learning for this group described? What did such learning usually consist of? Our exploration of such terms and definitions was important, but in order to achieve deep understanding about each others’ systems we had to go beneath these languages to talk about the values and beliefs they reflected and the historical and contemporary policies which they encapsulated. An early example here was understanding how and why different national systems might use the terms ‘teacher education’ or ‘teacher training’. Achieving this deep understanding of the educational languages we each spoke was a learning process for us all and coming to know each others’ languages meant that we learnt about the deep values, perspectives and assumptions underlying our different systems. As K.S. wrote, we were ‘sharing knowledge and experiences across borders’. One of J.M.’s narratives notes that this experience ‘gave me considerable insights into the many and varied contexts and roles ways for teacher educators’ work across Europe’. We were undoubtedly enriched by learning about these different perspectives, as we worked towards developing a shared and transnational language of teacher education which would enable us to talk about professional learning for the European teacher educator whose needs InFo-TED aims to address in our future work.

We then began the task of developing a conceptual model to represent this shared language and understanding; this was a task which rapidly became a rich learning activity for us all.

This learning happened not least because we drew on many current practices and previous research as our starting points for conceptualising professional development for European teacher educators. The professional frameworks devised by VELON in the Netherlands and VELOV in Flanders, for example, were important for us to analyse in terms of current practices. Interestingly, data analysis shows that even members from the Netherlands, speaking about the undoubted strengths of the VELON world-leading system, learned from this process and felt its benefits. M.L. said, for example:

... while, on the one hand, we have made huge steps in the Netherlands with regard to the professional development of teacher educators in the last decade, on the other hand I feel that what we have established is still local, limited and therefore vulnerable. Creating an international context ... opens up more learning possibilities for teacher educators *and* embeds national developments within a stronger European environment.

The multiple factors we needed to consider as our engagement in the task – and consequently our learning – deepened included: the expansion of the ‘traditional’ occupational group of higher education-based teacher educators to include those working in schools, often as mentors, to educate teachers; the inclusion criteria, status and stability of this expanded occupational group; the contexts that are important in influencing teacher educators’ practice – and consequently their professional development needs – and the intersection of these multiple contexts; the variety of teacher educators’ professional learning needs, differentiated by career stage, past work and life experiences and aspirations for the future; and, finally, the need for tailored pathways for individual and communal professional learning as a teacher educator, regardless of national context.

The diagram shown in Figure 1 shows the final conceptual model developed by InFo-TED. Full details of the principles behind the diagram and its structures and functions can be found online (<https://www.ntnu.edu/info-ted>) and in Vanassche *et al.* (2015), a publication which represents the communal work of the group (and is therefore quoted in some detail here). In this model the agreed starting point for the professional development of teacher educators is their professional stance; that is, their practice rooted in the realisation that they are ‘second order practitioners’ (Murray 2002) or teachers of teachers as summarised by Russell (1997, p. 3) in the statement ‘How I teach is the message’. The professional learning of teacher educators often takes place in the context of the workplace, wherever and whatever that is, but it is inevitably affected also by relevant national or regional policy contexts. In Figure 1, the local level shown refers to the culture of the schools or teacher education institutions in which the educators work and to the teacher education curricula. The national level shown in the diagram refers to national policy measurements and existing frameworks for teacher educators’ work. But in an increasingly globalised educational world, teacher educators’ practices are now also now influenced by international trends and socio-educational policy developments. The ‘dynamics of professional learning’ in the diagram presents a non-exhaustive list of possible content domains for teacher educators’ professional development. The model also shows that teacher educators work in different workplaces and support teachers’ learning at different stages of their career. This means that models of professional development need not only to pay attention to the context (organisation, institute, school) in which individual teacher educators work, but also to acknowledge that teacher educators have different professional learning needs depending on their positions in their careers and their biographical experiences and aspirations.

This diagram became an important ‘product’ of the group’s learning in its own right, but it was also an important factor when we began to consider our own professional development as ‘educators of teacher educators’. This factor is discussed in more detail in the conclusion to the article.

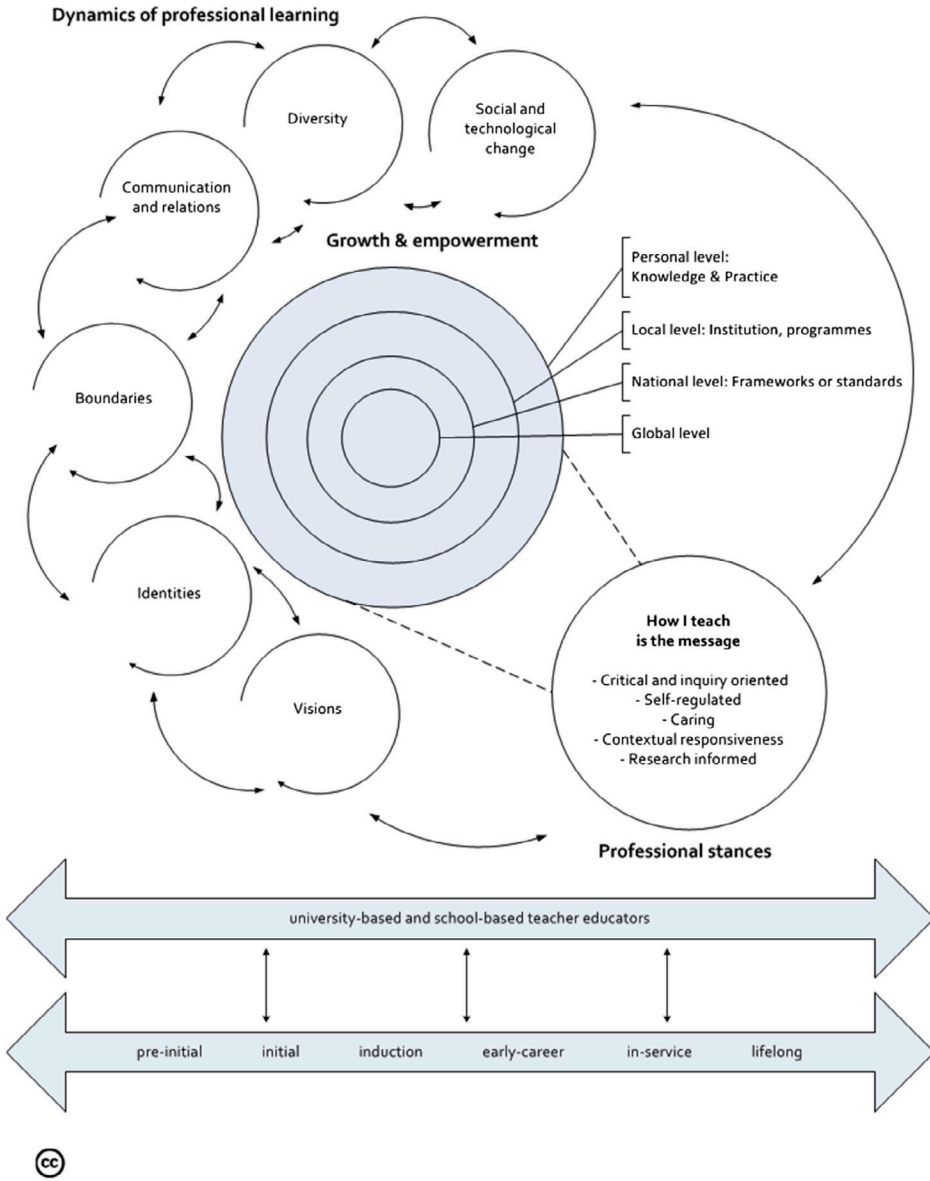


Figure 1. The InFo-TED conceptual model of teacher educator professional development.

5.3. Learning by discussing the development of an international survey

At the end of 2014 InFo-TED decided to prepare its next major activity, which was to undertake a large-scale survey of teacher educators’ professional learning needs in the seven countries represented across the group as a whole. We were aware of previous surveys or interview-based studies undertaken in particular countries (for example, Dengerink *et al.* [2015] in the Netherlands) and across national contexts (for example, Van Velzen *et al.* [2010] for the Research and Development Centre

within the Association for Teacher Education in Europe), but we aimed to devise a comprehensive survey tool which could be deployed effectively at scale across all our countries. This survey could then be used to analyse specific national trends, but also to identify pan-European patterns of need as we worked towards the broader aims of InFo-TED.

In devising the survey each of us had particular priorities, both in terms of how we conceptualised specific aspects of teacher educators' professional development and in relation to our own learning. K.S., for example, stated that:

I was interested in learning more about what knowledge, skills and attitudes in addition to their extensive disciplinary knowledge, either it was pedagogy or subject matter, [that] teacher educators need, in a way what is the Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman 1987) of teacher educators.

J.M. was interested in the development of professional knowledge needs in relation to espoused identities, reflecting her research into the inter-linking between those two aspects. M.L.'s priority was to find effective ways of identifying teacher educators' development needs in research, particularly in relation to self-study and pedagogic research close to practice. R.V. shared this interest, and was particularly focused on following up and extending previous work in Belgium (Tack and Vanderlinde 2014) mapping teacher educators' researcher dispositions against their stated learning needs. These research priorities were those which K.S., as the current co-director of NAFOL, was well placed to discuss and support.

Our development of the survey instrument, led primarily by three other InFo-TED colleagues, started from the shared language and principles already developed in the InFo-TED model, infused by the whole group's knowledge of the literature on teacher educators' professional development, including previous empirical work using surveys or interviews as data collection tools (see, for example, Murray *et al.* 2011). Despite having all of these elements in place, we still went through considerable debates about the exact form of the questions to be asked, with the need 'to honour the different national voices involved' (K.S.), a recurrent point of discussion and learning. In essence, our task was to create an internationally relevant research design, taking into account all of the nationally relevant language and terminology, specific ethics requirements and professional imperatives.

Coming from a variety of different methodological, philosophical and theoretical positions in teacher education research, our learning as researchers as we developed this research design, particularly the survey instrument, was significant. For example, one of the major learning points occurred when we devised the sampling strategy for the research design. In creating the conceptual model for teacher educators' professional learning, we had followed the broad and inclusive line of argument in the European Commission (2013) report that all those involved in the education of teachers, whether in schools or teacher education institutes, should be seen as teacher educators. The original intention of InFo-TED, then, was to use this definition to survey as many teacher educators as possible working in both types of locations in each country. But this immediately raised two issues – the question of defining who would be 'counted' as a school-based teacher educator for the survey and the issue of access. We all knew that recent European Commission (2015) policy indicates a pan-European trend towards increasing the amount of practical training, including school-based practice, within pre-service programmes. But as we started to discuss what this meant and how this trend had been – or was still to

be – achieved in each country, we immediately uncovered distinct divergences, including varied definitions of the school-based teacher educator.

We then necessarily needed to share the specifics of how and why developments in school-based practice, particularly the practicum, had developed in each country and which groups could consequently be defined as teacher educators in schools. As K.S.'s narratives indicated, in Norway, for example, where increased emphasis had been placed on the role of mentors in the practicum and government-funded professional development schemes were in place, this relatively clear-cut group could potentially be used to define school-based teacher educators. Here, whilst mentoring was being upgraded and enhanced, the basic structures of higher education and school responsibilities for student learning remained fundamentally unchanged. In contrast, J.M. wrote about the current context of teacher education in England as one of rapid change and fragmentation in which schools play a much more extensive role in all aspects of student-teachers' learning. She stated that:

These moves have created many new school-based teacher educators now involved in pre-service work ... in addition to conventional mentoring roles, some of these people now take on responsibility for organising all aspects of pre-service courses, including the recruitment, design and implementation of programmes and assessment at the end of the training process, sometimes – but not always – working alongside the traditional cohort of HE-based teacher educators. (J.M.)

In this process of information exchange, our data analysis indicates how much we learnt about the differences and commonalities in how school-based practice had been implemented within each country. It also indicated a growing consensus that surveying school-based teacher educators would pose real challenges to the robustness of the research design at the implementation stage, notably that we might not be comparing like-with-like in terms of this clearly diverse and ill-defined (in pan-European terms) occupational group. Difficulties in accessing this group, spread across the multiple locations of schools involved in pre-service teacher education in each country, made us decide as a group to limit the sample group to only higher education-based teacher educators in the first instance.

In the final survey, as R.V. said, 'national and international projects and collaborations become interwoven and naturally linked with each other', with various InFo-TED survey items evolving from earlier national projects to gain pan-European relevance. For example, the survey contained an item on how teacher educators conceptualised their identities which evolved from the Academic Tribes and their Territories in Teacher Education (A3TE) study in England (Murray *et al.* 2011), an item on attitudes to research and research dispositions developed from Tack and Vanderlinde's (2014) in-depth study and the inclusion of general pedagogical and learning emphases from the survey of Dengerink *et al.* (2015). In the end result, as R.V. says, 'What I found interesting is that national projects and initiatives on teacher educators' professional development benefit from "up scaling" them to an international level.'

Implemented in spring/summer 2015, the survey gathered responses from over 700 higher education-based teacher educators across the seven countries involved (Czerniawski *et al.* 2015). Analysis of this large-scale study is still in the early stages, and publications may be expected in 2016/2017.

5.4. *Summarising our learning*

Besides these two main learning themes, our analysis shows that communal writing for journals and books as well as the preparation of presentations for pan-European arenas have also provided significant learning opportunities for us. Again, the focus of this learning has often been how to use diversity of views – based on national voices – to generate transnational understandings.

For us as authors, there is a distinct interplay between our personal professional learning, the learning architecture of Info-TED, the learning affordances (Billett 2001) it offers and the ways in which we aim to support colleagues' professional development in our national contexts. Mapping our own learning against the conceptual model we developed to represent the learning of our teacher educator colleagues, we found that it also indicated many important features of our own learning as 'educators of teacher educators'. As in Figure 1, our practice as learning developers – and the values and principles which inform that practice – is at the root of all our work with our colleagues. Like them, our learning is affected by institutional, national and regional policy contexts, practices and frameworks. As educators working on pan-European initiatives and aiming to identify what it means to be a European teacher educator involved in transnational projects, we are clearly also influenced by international trends and socio-educational policy developments, which helps us to frame national issues.

6. Discussion and conclusions

6.1. *What and how did we learn?*

Our involvement in InFo-TED has provided us with the learning environment and the learning activities to support our professional development. We have identified the importance of a positive learning environment which allows for open, collegial but critical discussion and the generation of learning activities which enable deep debates on the values, principles and practices underpinning teacher educators' work. In our case, the development of a conceptual model and of a pan-European survey proved to be such activities.

The themes emerging from the analysis enable us to consider our overall professional learning and self-understanding from two inter-related perspectives: the first perspective is the interplay between our own learning and the way we want to support our teacher educator colleagues in our own countries in their professional development; and the second is the reciprocal effect of working in national as well as in transnational contexts. By considering our learning processes from these two perspectives we can see how a shared communal 'international forum' was established without losing individual voices and national perspectives.

Being invited by each other to go beneath daily language, and to talk about the values and beliefs this language reflected, hugely supported our learning. Achieving this deep understanding was an important learning process for us all which enabled us to support colleagues in our national contexts. Articulating your work in a clear and unambiguously way seems an important step in professional development. We would also add that the following factors are important for those designing and leading professional development: having deep, personal involvement in wanting to strengthen the professionalism of teacher educators; and being in positions to contribute to the existing knowledge about the learning of teacher educators in their

institutions and countries. Also important is being aware of the learning potential in analysing the differences and commonalities in practices (for teaching and research) in the many policy and institutional contexts for teacher education across Europe.

We found a productive reciprocal effect of working in national as well as in transnational contexts. Not only can we learn from each other's successes and pitfalls, but the need to explain our national systems also gave us a deeper insight into our own systems. It helped us to recognise that and how the educators of teacher educators and the members of the groups they work with can support each other to meet new nationally specific challenges supporting the professional development of teacher educators (e.g. to enhance research capability). We learned that where it is possible for teacher educators to participate in international communities and to gain personal experience of transnational learning, in which the importance of national voices can be both validated and productively utilised, then deeper awareness of their national contexts will result. In our case, we realised that it is particularly important to think about pan-European trends in teacher education, including the growing focus on teacher educators as a diverging occupational group (European Commission 2013).

On a more personal level, this study has helped us in our ongoing process of making sense of our experiences and their impact on our 'selves' (compare Kelchtermans 2009, p. 261). By establishing InFo-TED we not only created a platform that brings together, exchanges and promotes research, policy and practice related to teacher educators' professional development, but we also created a rich learning environment across boundaries for ourselves. As described, when mapping our own learning against the conceptual model, we found that it also indicated many important features of our own learning as 'educators of teacher educators'. Hence, while working on the InFo-Ted aims, we also continue to develop our own self-understanding as 'educators of teacher educators', alongside the learning of the teacher educators we serve.

6.2. *What are the implications of our findings?*

Probably the most important theme emerging from this research is that it is possible to make productive use of the tensions between expressing and honouring different national voices and developing common understanding and goals for being and learning as pan-European teacher educators.

InFo-Ted is developing an elaborated professional development programme with links to national programmes that will offer teacher educators across Europe the opportunity to experience this themselves. More precisely, three activities are planned for the coming years. The first activity is the development of a virtual learning platform that will function as a learning platform for this professional development programme. Secondly, a summer school for experienced teacher educators will be organised by InFo-Ted. The aim of this summer school is to offer experienced teacher educators the opportunity to become leading European teacher educators. Thirdly, we intend to extend the survey to include school-based teacher educators as an important group in pre-service teacher education programmes.

We hope that our work in InFo-TED will enable other European teacher educators to develop the feeling of "[B]elonging" as a teacher educator: their collective identity that which binds them as a professional group, and the affinities they feel, or do not feel, with other professional communities' (Davey 2013, p. 7). Only then can working together:

help us to develop our understanding of professional learning in complex and changing times when global imperatives have an increasing influence on the policies and practices that shape professional learning at the local level. (Stevenson 2015, p. 758)

We, the authors of this article, and InFo-TED as a group are taking a clear stance in the debate on teacher educators' professional development in and across Europe; we will continue to voice our message clearly to policy-makers who are discussing the nature and future of teacher educators' professional development. The long-term aims here, as ever, are to achieve higher quality and more holistic learning for teacher educators, but through that means to achieve better learning for student teachers and for the schools and children they will go on to serve.

Disclosure statement

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