Title
Towards an 'international Forum for Teacher Educator Development':
An Agenda for Research and Action
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Abstract

The outcomes of an international collaborative project are presented, involving experienced teacher educators and researchers from eight different countries, who engaged in a series of structured discussions on the professional development of teacher educators. We start with an overview of the needs in practice and policy, as well as the research interests, making structured opportunities for teacher educator development necessary. As a first outcome, we present a model to conceptualize teacher educator development, grounded in a study of the international literature and the systematic critical discussion of its findings by the participants in the project. The model facilitates international (research) collaboration, mapping and guiding initiatives in policy and practice by providing both an overview of the complexities of teacher educator development and a language to discuss them. The second – structural- outcome is the establishment of InFo-TED - the International Forum for Teacher Educator Development.

1. Introduction

What makes teacher educators a specific category of professionals in the educational field? What expertise and commitment are enacted in their professional practice? How can we stimulate, support or provide opportunities for them to develop professionally? Those were the central questions in a series of discussion meetings by a group of experienced teacher educators from Belgium, Ireland, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom and the USA (2010-2012). Parallel to the scholarly discussions, these same questions guided an exploration of the international research literature. The results of this literature review were fed back into the discussions, confronted with and critically analysed from the participants' experiences in their practice. As such a relatively unique process of collegial, collaborative and scholarly research unfolded including sustained, critical, documented and reflective discussions, analysing international research literature as well as the experiences in practice of colleagues operating in very different national educational contexts. The discussions were documented in minutes and working documents.

This paper presents the outcomes of this collaborative research process. It starts by arguing that teacher educators make up a particular group of professionals, with particular responsibilities, expertise and commitments in their respective educational systems. As a consequence, the development of that expertise and those responsibilities and commitments constitutes an important issue for policy makers, teacher education programs, as well as for educational research. For that reason –and as an important outcome of our collaborative research process, we secondly present a model to conceptualize the professional development of teacher educators, which results in an agenda for further research, policy and innovative practice. As a third and final outcome of the research process, we report on the establishment of the International Forum for Teacher Educator Development – InFo-TED. While the model is a conceptual outcome, InFo-TED is a structural and institutional result of the collaborative research process. Although the paper reconstructs and presents outcomes of the work from recent years, it also aims at being a position paper, in which this group of international colleagues takes a stance and formulates an agenda for future collaboration. As a conclusion we look backwards as well as forwards, inviting other colleagues to join the collaborative efforts.

2. Teacher Educator: what's in a name?

The actual structure and organization of teacher education differs greatly across different

countries (Darling-Hammond and Lieberman 2012; Townsend 2011. As a consequence the professional actors involved are diverse (for example, teacher educators may be professors or lecturers at universities or university colleges, experienced teachers acting as mentors or cooperating teachers in training schools and so forth) with different training backgrounds (for example, they may be researchers and / or former teachers). So, the word "teacher educator" covers a mixed and diverse group of professionals and a wide variety of practices. In this paper we will –unless stated otherwise- use the word as a generic and inclusive term, encompassing all types of people who are professionally involved and responsible for initial and on-going education of teachers. This broad definition is also in line with the one used by the European Commission (2013), describing teacher educators as 'all those who actively facilitate the (formal) learning of student teachers and teachers' (p. 8).

In spite of all the differences that exist across the world in educational systems and policies and in teacher education practices, there is a widespread agreement on the fact that the quality of teachers is of crucial importance for the quality of education (see, for example, Barber and Mourshed in The McKinsey Report [2007]; OECD 2005). The European Commission (2013), in this context, clearly states that 'If teachers are the most important in-school factor influencing the quality of students' learning, the competences of those who educate and support teachers must be of the highest order.' (p.54). As an immediate consequence it follows that teacher education - the education of the women and men responsible for teaching and learning in the schools - is just as crucial (European Commission 2013; Murray 2014). Hence one cannot but wonder why the education of teacher educators for such a long time has received only little attention from both policymakers and researchers. Becoming a teacher educator is in many countries considered as simply an often serendipitous career move for experienced teachers (Mayer et al. 2011), giving them opportunities to share their accumulated practical expertise with student teachers, or as becoming a teacher in tertiary education, as just another level in the educational system, teaching somewhat older students instead of primary or secondary school pupils.

While research on teacher education emerged as a significant strand in research on education in the 1980s (Zeichner 1999; Furlong et al. 2000; Cochran-Smith and Villegas 2015), the professional preparation of teacher educators has been less widely researched. It is only since about the new millennium that both researchers and practitioners have insistently argued that teacher educators constitute a specific category of professionals, needing specific expertise

(Berry, in press; Murray 2008; Smith, 2003) for the specific goals and responsibilities of their job and - for that reason - in need for opportunities to acquire and develop that specific expertise (Ben-Peretz 2001; Loughran 2006; Loughran & Hamilton, 2016; Swennen, Jones, and Volman 2010).

One important dimension in teacher educator expertise concerns their skills as researchers – not only in the traditional academic sense of the word, but also through methodologies of studying their own practices. This study of one's own practice aims at an increased, data-based insight in the complexities of that practice, constituting the basis for effective initiatives for improvement, but also –and importantly- at contributing to a public, grounded and explicit knowledge base reflecting the professional know how on pedagogy of teacher education (see a.o. Loughran, Hamilton, Kubler LaBoskey, and Russell, 2004; Loughran, 2006; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015).

3. Teacher Educator: occupation or profession?

So, what constitutes the specific professional expertise of teacher educators? What makes them different from other professional actors in the educational field? What is their professional knowledge and how is it enacted in their professional practices? How do they acquire this knowledge? These questions are relevant and necessary to answer as many teacher educators have to acquire new kinds of expertise when taking on the position of teacher educator, especially if their background lies solely in either school teaching or research (Goodwin and Kosnik 2013; Murray and Male 2005; Smith, 2011).

A fundamental characteristic of that expertise is its *dual level*: teacher educators are teachers of teachers and their 'teaching subject' is 'teaching'. They are not primarily teaching a particular subject discipline (for example, mathematics, language, science) but rather the 'teaching of that subject discipline' (see also Loughran 2006). Murray (2002), for that reason, talks about teacher educators as being *'second-order practitioners'*. Moving from teaching to teacher education, therefore, implies a fundamental shift in expertise, practices as well as the sense of professional identity (Berry 2007), and implies a focus on teacher educators as researchers (see Lunenberg, Dengerink, and Korthagen 2014; Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014). As such, teacher educators need to be acknowledged as a specific and autonomous profession. In line with this growing recognition, one can observe a shift in the focus of attention from policy, research and practice - to identity, knowledge, research, and professional learning. In this context, Verloop (2001) describes seven criteria

(see also Shulman, 1998) for being a 'profession' (like medicine or law): 1) the profession performs a crucial social function, 2) the profession requires a considerable degree of skill, 3) its practitioner draws on a body of structured knowledge, 4) entry in the profession requires a lengthy period of higher education, 5) the profession focuses on the pre-eminence of clients' interests, 6) professionals have a certain amount of freedom to make their own judgements with regard to what is considered appropriate practice, and 7) the profession is rewarded by high prestige and a high level of remuneration. Applying these criteria to the occupation of teacher educators (Lunenberg, Dengerink, and Korthagen 2014), teacher educators clearly meet the criteria 1, 5 and 6. Regarding the other criteria, the understanding of the work of teacher educators, what set of skills is needed, what is the structured knowledge of teacher education, and what lengthy education is required to become a teacher educator, are still areas in development and requires more research. However, in recent years several researchers have pursued this argument in their research. For instance, as regards criteria 3, an overall structured knowledge base is still not yet available, but there is work in progress (e.g. in The Netherlands, see next section); and for criteria 4, teacher educators' professional development initiatives can be found, but they are not systematic and still 'ad hoc' (Vanassche, Rust, Conway, Smith, Tack, and Vanderlinde, 2015). From these perspectives, the position taken in this paper is that teacher educators are gradually moving from an occupation to a specific profession, and therefore members of the emerging profession require specific professional development.

This increasing interest in teacher educators' professionalism is also echoed in recent policy documents across Europe, as well as initiatives for the professional development of teacher educators in several countries (see for instance Vanassche, Rust, Conway, Smith, Tack, and Vanderlinde, 2015 for a description of the situation in Belgium/Flanders, Ireland, and Norway; and see Lunenberg, Dengerink, and Korthagen (2014) for a description of initiatives organised in The Netherlands). More specifically, the European Commission has stressed the important role of well prepared and highly-qualified teacher educators to prepare and support the next generation of teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels in two recent reports: *Supporting the Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes* (2012) and *Supporting Teacher Educators for Better Learning Outcomes* (2013). An associated EU conference in Dublin in 2013 repeated and confirmed this stance. Specific recommendations from a European perspective have been formulated, demanding for an ongoing dialogue among key stakeholders in and around the teacher educator profession, and arguing for a

shared vision and common understanding of what is meant by quality in educating teachers. The latter is seen as a career-long process of learning and development (Livingston 2014). The widely accepted view that teachers need high-quality opportunities for continuing professional development during their career, equally applies to teacher educators. Furthermore, effective professional collaboration and partnerships between teacher educators working in different settings, (for example university subject departments, university education departments, schools and local authorities) need to be established (Smith, 2015). Furthermore, since the understanding of who is a teacher educator is still not always clear, not everybody involved has developed a sense of professional identity as a teacher educator (Livingston 2014).

4. Educating the teacher educator: an emerging field

Though the vast majority of practising teacher educators has one or more post-graduate degrees in education or a cognate discipline, worldwide those responsible for the education of future teachers have rarely been formally and specifically prepared for their role (Zeichner and Conklin 2005), as in most countries systematic and sustained efforts for the induction and professional education for teacher educators have been missing. One exception to that rule is Israel's MOFET Institute, where the mission is 'to serve as a professional meeting-place for teacher educators and to facilitate an educational dialogue among colleagues both in the teacher education system and in other settings in the education system.' (MOFET 2015). MOFET is the only government-sponsored centre that supports teacher educators' professional development, based on research and development. It was founded in the clear belief that teacher educators have their own and unique expertise, and as such, need specific answers to their professional development needs.

Recently several different and diverse national initiatives have been taken within Europe to address the issue of teacher educator professionalism. For instance, in the Netherlands a *'Professional Standard of Teacher Educators'* (VELON 2011) has been presented as a frame of reference for the teacher educator job, and a *'Knowledge Base for Teacher Educators'* has been launched (VELON 2011). This 'knowledge base of teacher educators' is described in the Netherlands as a shared knowledge of a community of professionals (VELON 2015), including 10 different domains of knowledge: the profession of teacher educators, teacher education pedagogy, learning and learners, teaching and coaching, type of teacher education program, subject pedagogies, policy developments, internal organisation of teacher education

programs, curriculum and assessment, and self-study of teacher educators. In other words, the 'knowledge base' provides an overview of the definition of the professional knowledge of a teacher educator, and is exemplified through encyclopaedic articles, case studies, questions for discussion and reflection and suggestions for further theoretical elaboration. This 'knowledge base' is not only important for the profession and further professional development of individual teacher educators, it can also be used as a reference for the further development of training programs for teacher educators in the Netherlands.

In Flanders - the Dutch speaking part of Belgium - the *'Flemish Teacher Educator Development Profile'* has been developed describing the knowledge, skills and attitudes teacher educators need in order to be able to function effectively (VELOV 2012). Rather than prescribing the knowledge base needed by teacher educators, the *'Flemish Teacher Educator Development Profile'* aims to support the development of the relevant, contextualised professional expertise by the teacher educators. It further wants to provide a common language for teacher educators, to engage in professional dialogue and collaboration on their job definitions and roles, as well as their development as professionals.

Regarding professional development programmes for new teacher educators, the Higher Education Academy in England supported the development of the *'Becoming a teacher Educator: guidelines for induction'* (Boyd, Harris, and Murray 2011). In some countries, such as Norway (Smith 2015) and Israel (Orland-Barak 2005), teacher education departments in universities provide, in collaboration with schools, programmes for the induction and professional development of school-based teacher educators or mentors. In addition, some more extensive programmes focused on the professional development of more experienced teacher educators have been initiated, for example, programmes to become a certified teacher educator in the Netherlands. In Norway, a programme of systematic support for teacher educators to gain a doctorate and also for those who choose not to work towards a PhD, but still want to engage in professional learning, has been established. The latter is organised by NAFOL - the *'Norwegian National Graduate School in Teacher Education'* - (Østern and Smith 2013). NAFOL is the Norwegian national research school in teacher education which aims to strengthen Norwegian teacher education through empowering teacher educators as researchers and developing a national knowledge base in teacher education. Additionally, there have been efforts to develop new pan-European doctoral programmes for teacher educators (www.Edite.eu; Caena 2014).

5. Conceptualizing Teacher Educator Development: presentation of a model

Against the backdrop of this diversity in educational systems, teacher education programs, the position of teacher educator and the (absence of) initiatives for their professional development, it can't come as a surprise that the collaborative research project quickly found that a coherent, grounded, and shared conceptualisation of teacher educator development was an essential condition for an effective continuation of the process. Systematic exchange of practice-based experiences in diverse contexts throughout our discussions as well as their confrontation with international research has resulted in a conceptual model, with a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, the model is intended to provide a map to delineate the object of our interest, and on the other hand it aims to provide a common language to frame the issue. We are very much aware that both in this mapping and the choosing of a language we take a stance - and that stance inevitably implies normative, political and professional choices. Yet, the purpose of the model remains first of all descriptive and communicative. Our model should not be read as a normative blueprint (Kelchtermans 2013) to prescribe professional development or to assess teacher educators' professionalism (and to assess whether an individual does or does not meet the listed criteria for professional practice). That would, as will become clear below, contradict the very idea of teacher educators as professionals, as we understand it. Neither should the model be used in the accreditation of training programs for teacher educators.

With these basic assumptions in place, InFo-TED takes a clear position in the debate on how to best understand and support teacher educators' professional development.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The starting point for the professional development of teacher educators, in our opinion, needs to be their practice. We start from the assumption that acting teacher educators have good reasons for doing their job the way they are doing it. That starting point then gives a positive appreciation of the practice in which teacher educators 'enact' their expertise. This is radically different from a deficit approach in which teacher educators' practices would be evaluated against the normative outline of the necessary competencies or evidence-based 'best practices'.

Our 'practice-based' approach (Kelchtermans 2013) – in contrast to the 'blueprint'-approach - starts from the idea that the actual practice reveals 'who' a teacher educator is and what s/he really stands for. In terms of Argyris and Schön's (1978) distinction, our stance implies that we do not start from the 'espoused theory' (the reasons people provide for their action) but rather from the 'theory in use' (the ideas, principles, beliefs that lie underneath what one is actually doing and, as such, can only be revealed by that practice). Teacher educators' sense of professional self or identity needs to be seen as reflected in their actions. In other words, the teacher educator as such only "emerges" in his/her practice (Kelchtermans 2013).

Furthermore, these professional actions are constitutive for the professional messages they are sending out, in other words for the 'content' of their teaching about teaching. As Russell (1997) has argued: 'How I teach is the message!'. Based on the research literature, as well as our experiences and group discussions, we argue that a teacher educator's actual practice needs to send the following messages as reflections of his/her stance in the profession: it should be critical and inquiry-oriented (reflective, looking for evidence, critically making explicit one's stance); self-regulated; caring; contextual responsiveness; and being research informed.

In their teaching practices teacher educators inevitably model teaching: they cannot 'not model', because student teachers will automatically observe them and judge the relationship between their words and actions (Loughran 2006). From that starting point, the concentric circles (see Figure 1) reflect the movement and dynamics of professional learning, as well as its inevitable situated-ness in a particular context. The point of departure for professional development needs to be the enacted practices by the individual teacher educator (personal level), as a reflection of his/her professional normative choices and judgment about what is or has to be the appropriate action in that particular situation. The professional knowledge of teacher educators combines solid theoretical knowledge with practical skills, inter-personal communication competence, and experience. The enacting of such a complex set of knowledge takes place within the teacher educator's professional space, which is created by the situation and rarely repeats itself. Personal judgment, personal knowledge and beliefs as well as the repertoire of skills and attitudes of the individual professional are central for teacher educators in reflecting on and understanding their practices.

Individual practices, however, are always situated in particular local contexts (teacher education institutes, universities, training schools, for example) and within specific programmes and curricula as part of the educational system in a particular country. This system also includes different partnerships with other organisations (for example training institute-training schools, but also professional organisations). Next, the practices by the teacher educators in their diverse organisational or local contexts are framed and influenced by national policy measures (including national frameworks or guidelines, standards and evaluation procedures). We do not think, however, of the relationship between the standards and the teacher education practices as linear and deterministic. Policy prescriptions are always interpreted, negotiated and translated into particular practices in the local organisational context in which a teacher educator is working. For that reason the central goal of teacher educator development is personal empowerment to successfully design and enact their practices. Empowerment implies on the one hand in acknowledging teacher educators' work and the expertise it reflects, and on the other hand on creating opportunities to further develop and improve the expertise. Since teacher educators' expertise often remains hidden (Livingstone 2014) or implicit – often reflected only in their practices - their professional development needs to include efforts to make that implicit expertise explicit and to create opportunities to share it with others. This, at the same time, will inevitably imply collegial discussion, forcing the teacher educator to critically reflect on and possibly modify his/her expertise. So becoming aware of and making one's expertise public is an essential constituent of professional development, much similar to what Sachs (2015) calls the learning approach (in relation to teachers). Practitioners actively express their opinions and knowledge and become involved with creating a knowledge base for their occupation as a process of establishing the profession. Finally, we situate teacher educators' practices in a global level in order to stress the relation with supra-national and societal evolutions.

The left hand side of the model provides a non-exhaustive list of the content domains that we believe ought to be included in opportunities for teacher educator professional development. These content domains are non-exhaustive given our 'practice-based' approach to teacher educators' professional development. Put differently, the content domains or 'dynamics of professional learning' are illustrative, as making them exhaustive would imply a choice for a 'blueprint' approach.

The increasing diversity of modern society is reflected in schools and constitutes multiple challenges for teachers and therefore also for teacher educators who are supposed to prepare teachers for this diverse reality in schools. Pupils are not only diverse in the traditional categories of individual capacities or socio-economic backgrounds, but also increasingly in culture, language, ethnic identity, nationality and home situation. Teacher educators inevitably operate in complex networks of different groups and individuals (including students, parents, partner school staff, colleagues, policy makers). Their positioning in these networks, their willingness and capacity to cross traditional boundaries and to engage with a diversity of people (communication and relations), without losing sight of the bigger picture and purpose of their work, these are all important domains for professional learning. Achieving this capacity to respond to and engage with diverse perspectives, influences, and relationships requires confidence and at the same time a self-critical stance on the part of the teacher educator. Tack and Vanderlinde (2014) speak about a 'researcherly disposition' as the habit of mind to engage in research and thus to produce both local knowledge and public knowledge on teacher education. In addition, it requires conscious development of different identities, or put differently, a coherent system of different ways to conceive of (and understand) oneself in the profession (Kelchtermans 2009).

Finally, professional development for and among teacher educators should include exposure to big ideas or world-views, including not only different theoretical frameworks on education, teaching and becoming a teacher, but also more fundamental ethical, political and theoretical concepts and positions. This exposure to and study of different conceptual frameworks and theories will also operate as a strong impetus to self-critically become aware of and analyse one's normative ideas (and the ways in which they are enacted in or reflected by one's practices). It is clear that this self-critical reflection or engagement with different normative views is not a neutral intellectual endeavour, but it is our sense that taking such a perspective must and will help teacher educators to be able to develop a normative stance in their practice as well as the capacity and willingness to take responsibility for it. It is further obvious that the stance taken eventually results in the need for teacher educators to develop a researcher's attitude towards their own practice (individual or collaborative with peers from the same or other institutes). In other words, the professional development of teacher educators as we see it demands an attitude and self-positioning in the tradition of the 'reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983, McHatton, Parker and Vallice 2013). In order to develop one's professionalism, and also to improve one's practice (individual or collective), this reflective stance needs to be

pushed regularly into real research activities in that practice. Such research activities are key elements of teacher educators' professional learning. Loughran (2014) speaks about a teacher educators' career as a 'research journey'. Teacher educators have to engage in research to improve their knowledge about teaching, their knowledge about students' learning, their own teaching, and teacher education in general. Research thus needs to constitute an inherent part of the core practices of a teacher educator: teaching about teaching. Cochran-Smith (2005) has referred to this as 'working the dialectic'. Examples and methodologies to draw on are the long standing international traditions of action research, teacher as researcher or self-study in teacher education practices (for example Altrichter et al. 2008; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009; Loughran et al. 2004; Noffke and Somekh 2008).

The first of the two lines at the bottom of the model reminds us that we use an inclusive definition of teacher educators, encompassing a wide spectrum of positions in the educational system, from university-based to school-based teacher educators. This also implies that we acknowledge the diversity in professional backgrounds of teacher educators. With the last line we stress the importance of thinking of teacher educators' practice as not only situated in a spatial context (for example, an organization or institute), but always also in a temporal context. Understood from the position of the individual, this implies that professional development always needs to take into account one's career or biography, a position that is always influenced by experiences from the past as well as expectations for the future. Teacher educators can and often enter the job from very different pathways, and their needs for development will be different depending on the career stage. Again - and similar to the influence from the organisational or institutional context - we do not think of career stages or phases as strict determinants of teacher educator's development, but rather as temporal elements of the context against which teacher educators give meaning to their experiences, feel particular needs for professional learning and/or make sense of what is offered to them in professional development opportunities (Kelchtermans 2009).

To sum up this section, our conceptual model on teacher educator professional development can help to continue to see 'the wood for the trees' in specific discussions or practices, to remember where one is and to keep in mind that the model is primarily meant to be dynamic. Furthermore it provides the shared language that is essential for colleagues from different institutional and international borders to be able to engage in collaborative research, improvement of practice or discussions with policy makers – which is the way we are

working in InFo-TED. In the last section of this paper we present InFo-TED as a forum for teacher educators in exchanging their research and practices, but also as an agenda for research and action.

6. Institutionalising Teacher Educator Development: an international forum

Next to the model as a conceptual outcome, our international collaboration also had a structural outcome: the establishment of *InFo-TED* or the *International Forum for Teacher Educator Development.,*The positive experiences in the meetings and discussions as well as the increased and documented awareness of the importance of the issue, led to the need to institutionalize the ad hoc meetings and to provide a structural basis for the ongoing discussion across international colleagues. The name and the central word "forum" clearly indicate its purpose and rationale: the forum is a place for collegial debate on issues of public importance. This paper is one exemplary outcome illustrating this commitment to public debate.

The general aim of InFo-TED is to bring together people across the world to exchange research and practice related to teacher educators' professional development. InFo-TED also proposes concerted actions - based on this body of evidence from research and practice - at institutional, national and international levels to create opportunities and incentives rather than requirements.

First we argue that there is a need to raise awareness of the different and distinctive national and institutional contexts teacher educators are working in and how they affect their practices as well as their opportunities to develop professionally. At the same time we acknowledge that we still lack a clear identification of the common challenges teacher educators experience in teaching and teacher education across diverse national and cultural contexts in order to promote mutual exchange and professional learning, as well as collaborative (political) action for improvement. That means more research is required before we are able to e.g. map the needs of beginning and experienced teacher educators for professional learning, recognise the life-history and career trajectory of those entering the profession of teacher education – often involving a change of professional identity in mid-career. InFo-TED works to support this line of research, as well as to support the adoption of a broad view of who teacher educators are; a diverse group of teacher educators working in a variety of contexts. Their shared professionalism encompasses the need for developing a sense of identity, including

knowledge, skills and dispositions, and also the expertise and courage to judge professional situations, act on that judgment and take responsibility for it.

An important further step is to map existing initiatives vis-à-vis the education of teacher educators to provide an overview, create opportunities to exchange or to critically question the degree to which they actually contribute to teacher educators as responsible and committed professionals (rather than, e.g. executors of prescriptions imposed by policy makers) focused in particular on professional development programmes. Professional learning with the support of trusted 'communities of practice' (Clemans, Berry and Loughran 2010) at national and trans-national levels are to be stimulated and supported. The time of the isolated teacher educator belongs to the past, and 'communities of practice' reaching far beyond the local context are today both technically possible and expected. Finally, to meet an important characteristic of a profession distinct recognised and validated knowledge domains are required, and we are not yet able to define such a knowledgebase. The InFo-Ted model points at directions of where to go, yet we strongly argue for extended research, exchange of ideas and practices followed by critical discussions at a cross-national level.

This agenda is at the same time also a call for research and action. InFo-TED members are committed to develop multiple collaborative strategies to contribute to the achievement of these goals, both within and across national boundaries. A central tool reflecting the idea of the international forum was the development of a central website, both to present the results of the collaborative efforts, to facilitate the discussion among professional peers internationally and to launch new initiatives (and invitations to participate). Through the virtual forum as well as the multiple initiatives and products, we aimed at constructing an international space where teacher educators can feel 'at home', acknowledged and recognized in their professionalism.

In addition, InFo-TED is organizing an international summer school for teacher educators at which face-to-face discussions will provide new insights and create an international community of practice of teacher educators. These meetings and discussions strengthen teacher educators' sense of professional identity as members of a unique profession. As such, InFo-TED works towards the criteria, necessary to become a full profession (Verloop 2001). To put it differently, InFo-TED wants to contribute to teacher educators as a profession that describes, following Shulman (1998), *'a special set of circumstances for deep understanding, complex practice, ethical conduct, and higher-order learning'* (p. 515).

Yet apart from providing a sense of home-coming and belonging, we hope InFo-TED will operate as a professional learning community, characterized by 'constructive controversy' (Achinstein, 2002). that continuously stimulates teacher educators to critically and creatively push the boundaries of their professionalism beyond the existing and the taken for granted, to the benefit of themselves, their student-teachers and -eventually- children and society as a whole.

7. Looking back and envisioning the future

Teacher education is a central element in almost any educational policy discussion. When looking back we find that surprisingly little attention has been given to the main actors in teacher education - the teacher educators and their professionalism. In this paper we have presented a stance claiming that teacher educators' work and responsibilities are unique and teacher educators' professionalism should be acknowledged and conceptualised. To explicitly formalise our stance we have presented the recently established forum for teacher educators, InFo-TED as well as its rationale. The core is a conceptual model of teacher educators' professionalism (including dynamics of professional learning). In line with those initiatives we have in this paper discussed the agenda for action, including the creation of virtual and physical spaces for teacher educators' learning internationally and being a strong voice in future policy-making on teacher education.

InFo-TED represents a relatively unique outcome of what can be understood as new, promising forms of international scholarly collaboration, research, policy development and innovative practices. It not only acknowledges difference and diversity of contexts and educational systems, but actually embraces them as sources for intellectual, political, and practical action on a common, public interest: the professional development of teacher educators.

More information about InFo-TED (goals, conferences, etc.) can be found on
https://www.ntnu.edu/info-ted

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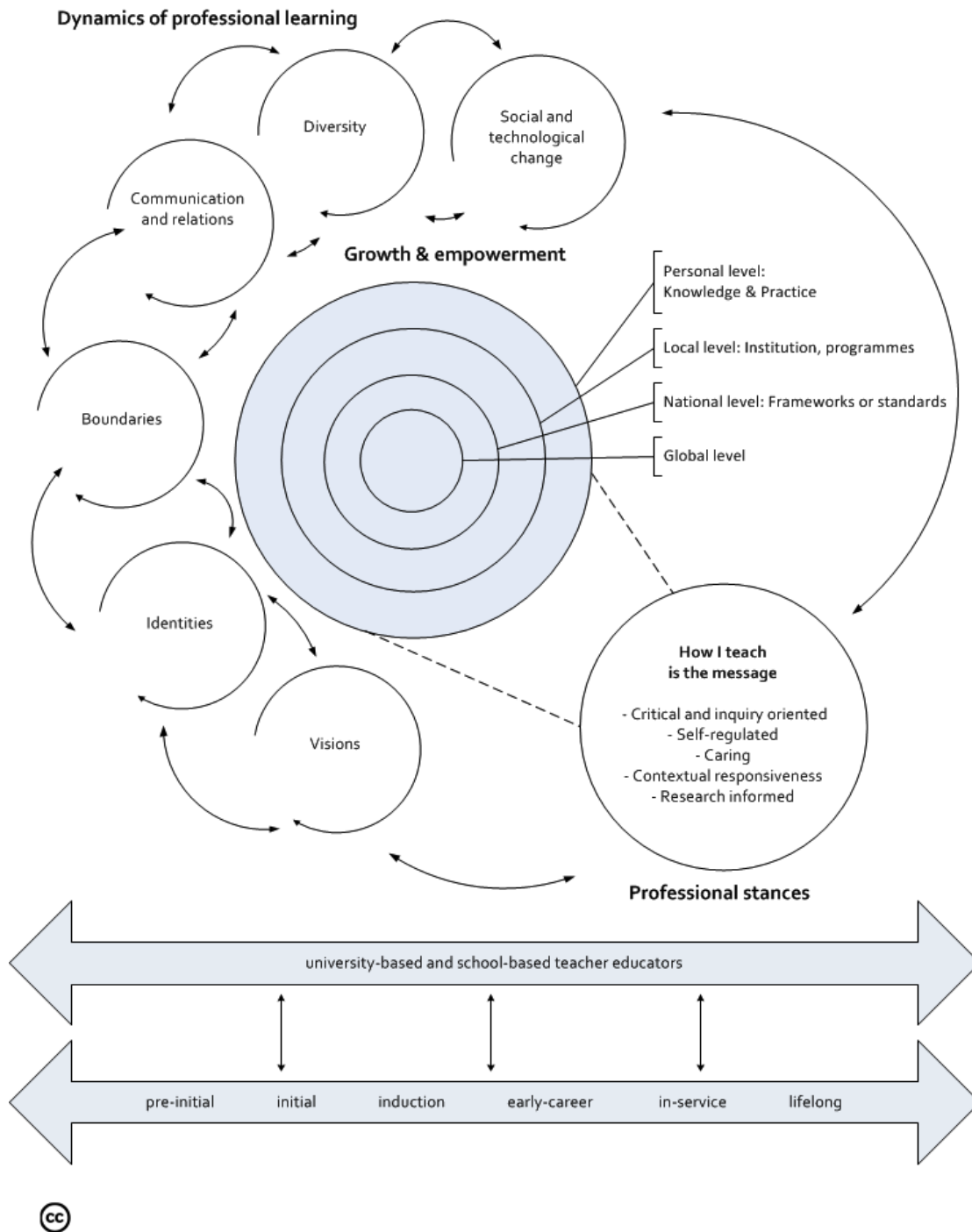
Figure 1: A Conceptual Model of Teacher Educator Professional Development