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The Teacher Educator: A Neglected Factor in the Contemporary Debate on Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have identified that the teacher is the most important factor influencing the quality of education. Following this line of reasoning, it is likely to assume that the teacher educator is the most important factor influencing the quality of teacher education. Although many research studies and policy documents attempt to identify the qualities of teachers, only a few publications address the quality of teacher educators. This paper examines the contemporary European policy debate on the quality and status of teacher educators. Two issues will be addressed. Firstly, to what extent is teacher educator regarded as a profession? Secondly, what actions and measures are proposed to maintain or increase the quality and status of the teacher educator profession? Based on literature on professions and professionalism, a framework has been developed to guide our examination of European policy documents on teacher education to identify to what extent these documents express notions of teacher educators as professionals.

Key words: teacher, teacher educator, quality of education, teacher education policy, professionalism

1 Introduction

In recent debates on the quality of education, much attention has been paid to the quality of teachers since teachers are identified as the most important factor influencing the quality of education (Abbott, 1988; Hattie, 2003; Barber & Mourshed, 2007). The quality of teachers has a larger impact on the learning of pupils than the quality of the curriculum, the teaching methods, the school building or the role of

parents. As a result, policies with respect to teacher quality are receiving significant attention. Although the European Commission's jurisdiction is limited in the area of education, the Commission has recently paid considerable attention to the quality of teachers, thus stimulating national governments to invest in the improvement of teacher quality, for example by exchanging policies and practices across Europe (see, for example, Snoek, Uzerli & Schratz, 2008).

In these policy debates there is a strong awareness that the quality of teachers depends on the quality of their teacher education and this is reflected in recent European policy documents published by the European Commission (European Commission, 2005; 2007) or the European Council (European Council, 2007). As an addition to these policy documents, together with the OECD the European Commission has initiated research such as the Teaching and Learning International Survey ("TALIS") that investigates the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers in schools. This policy attention to the quality of teachers and teacher education is reflected on national levels. Recently, several European countries have raised the level of initial teacher education to the master's level and many European countries have developed explicit standards for the teaching profession. National governments feel a strong responsibility regarding the quality of education and therefore regarding the quality of teachers.

Teacher standards or professional profiles play an important role as part of this responsibility. "The overarching priority is for countries to have in place a clear and concise statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and to do. This is necessary to provide a framework to guide initial teacher education, teacher certification, teachers' ongoing professional development and career advancement, and to assess the extent to which these different elements are being effective" (OECD, 2005, 131).

Given the contemporary European attention to the quality of teachers and teacher education, it is interesting to see which parallels exist between teachers and teacher educators. When the general consensus is that teachers are the most important in-school factor influencing the quality of their pupils' learning, it seems appropriate to assume that teacher educators are an important factor influencing the quality of the learning of their student teachers. Following this line of reasoning, it seems reasonable to assume that in the European policy debate considerable attention is being paid to the quality for teacher educators.

If the teacher educator plays a key role in the quality of teacher education, then the issue of the professionalism of the teacher educator is becoming an issue of paramount importance. Recent publications (see, for example, Loughran 2006; Swennen & Van der Klink, 2009) argue that the professionalism of the teacher educator is best served by perceiving teacher educators as a specialised professional group and that teacher educators need specialised professional activities in order to fulfil their complex tasks (Smith, 2003). The emergence of the teacher educator profession is reflected in the establishment of national and international professional associations like the American Association of Teacher Education (“ATE”), the Association of Teacher Education in Europe (“ATEE”) and the Dutch Association for Teacher Educators (“VELON”), which can be regarded as an indication that teacher educators themselves see their work as a profession.

This paper discusses to what extent European policy documents address the quality and professionalism of teacher educators as a topic of policy concern. The next sections elaborate on the issue of what constitutes a profession, on emerging new professions and professionalism and on measurements and actions to enhance professionalism. After a brief description of the methodology applied the findings will be presented, followed by some conclusions and recommendations for further research.

2 Characteristics of professions and professionalism

Although the English word “profession” may refer to occupations in general, the word was originally used for high status professions like medicine, law or architecture. Members of these prestigious professions and outsiders as well attach certain, positive, characteristics to these professions. Here we briefly highlight the five main features of the classical view of professions.

A monopoly of members of the profession is the foremost important feature of high status professions in the classical view of professions: “Those specialisations which embody values held by the public at large, the state or some powerful elite are given the privileged status of monopoly, or control over their own work. This monopolistic control is the essential characteristic of ideal-typical professionalism from which all else flows” (Freidson, 2001, 32). A second feature concerns the

prominent role of the profession regarding the entry requirements and the further professional development of individual members. Professions also have the power to judge, and subsequently even to exclude, members who do not adhere to the professional standards and ethical code. The third characteristic of professions is that they have an ethical code that has at least two important aims. First, it is a means to win the trust of the public and public bodies (often governments) that have the power to license the profession and its members. Trust of the public is an important aspect of the status of professions as their existence predominantly depends on service to the public (Evetts, 2006). The second aim of the ethical code is to serve as a guideline for good conduct of members of that particular profession. The fourth important characteristic of classical professions is academic knowledge (Abbott, 1988), formal knowledge or technical knowledge (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). “Academic knowledge legitimises professional work by clarifying its foundations and tracing them to major cultural values. In most modern professions, these have been the values of rationality, logic, and science. Academic professionals demonstrate the rigor, the clarity, and the scientifically logical character of professional work” (Abbott, 1988, 54). Finally, a fifth feature of the classical professions is the freedom of establishment. Members do not have a job contract but are independent and self-employed.

It goes without saying that teaching and teacher education have never been regarded as classical professions. Teaching, like nursing, social work and librarianship, was once called a semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969) or sub-profession (Marcus, 1973). Members of semi-professions are less autonomous than those of the classical professions and they work within organisations and institutes like schools, hospitals and libraries that are characterised by bureaucracy and hierarchy. The autonomy of teachers and schools is further limited by the influence of governments that have, depending on the rules and regulations in specific countries, more or less influence on the content of the curriculum and the pedagogy of the teachers (see Snoek & Žogla, 2009). In addition, the academic levels of the teaching and teacher education professions are limited. It is still relatively rare for teacher educators to be research-trained and/or to have carried out postgraduate studies. In particular, this is the case among teacher educators working with pre-school and primary school teacher education (Erixon, Frånberg & Kallós, 2001).

Over the last few decades the term “new professionalism” has been broadly used to refer to various kinds of occupations that cannot be regarded as professions in the classical sense, such as teachers (Evans, 2008; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, Robertson, 1996). Although the meaning of the “new professionalism” concept is somewhat blurred and varies from author to author and context to context, there are some general characteristics, which will be outlined here.

One general characteristic is that “new professionalism” is connected to discourses concerning improvements in the quality of work and a stronger emphasis on output requirements. In most European countries these changes are initiated by governments and not by the professionals themselves. As a consequence, most teachers look at the concept negatively. New professionalism was linked to “labour flexibility and deregulation of schools” and the discourse was about “quality, outcomes, professionalism, flexibility, work teams, competency” (Robertson, 1996).

A second characteristic of new professionalism “involves a movement away from the traditional professional authority and autonomy towards new forms of relationships and collaboration with colleagues, students and their parents” (Hargreaves, 1994, 424).

A third characteristic of new professionalism is accountability. Assessments of pupils and students are frequently conducted to gain detailed insights into their learning outcomes. Further, teachers have to explicate how their teaching contributes to achieving the intended learning outcomes.

A fourth feature is the emphasis on improvement and innovation, although professionals seem to differ in this respect. Professionals such as business consultants are considered to be more in the forefront of the continuous renewal of concepts, methods and tools, while some professionals, such as teachers, tend to rely on routines even if these routines are not quite appropriate anymore. However, when teaching is seen as a dynamic and innovative profession teachers will reflect on their own practice and contribute to the improvement and innovation of the profession.

A fifth feature concerns the nature of the knowledge base, which need not only be formal and academic like in the classical professions but can also be the result of experience and reflection.

A sixth feature concerns the increased attention to the professional development of professionals throughout their careers. It is generally accepted that in our knowledge-intensive society lifelong learning is becoming essential for one's career-long professional development.

A seventh characteristic concerns the implementation of standards describing competencies and qualifications of beginners and expert members of professions. An example of standards for different stages in teachers' careers is developed by the English Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA, 2007). The frequent use of the word "professional" indicates the importance given to the further professional development of teachers.

It is clear that not all of these features apply fully to teacher educators.

3 Actions and measurements to increase the professionalism of teacher educators

The analysis of European policy documents addressing the professionalism of teacher educators requires a reference frame. Based on our analysis of the characteristics of classical professions and new professionalism and on the work of Loughran (2006), Lunenburg & Willemse (2006), Murray & Male (2005), Swennen & Van der Klink (2009), Smith (2003), Van Velzen, Van der Klink, Swennen & Yaffe (2010), we identified the following possible actions and measurements that can support policies with respect to the professionalism of teacher educators:

1. identifying the professionalism of teacher educators as a matter of concern;
2. suggesting proposals for improving professionalism;
3. initiating research to investigate the state of the art;
4. launching committees and advisory boards;
5. developing and implementing national legislation on quality requirements for teacher educators;
6. developing accountability systems;
7. paying attention to teacher educator professionalism in the accreditation procedure of teacher education programmes;
8. implementing selection criteria for entry into the profession;
9. offering formal education (courses or an entire master's programme) for new teacher educators;

10. creating induction programmes for teacher educators;
11. ensuring resources and requirements for continuous professional development;
12. taking measures to enhance the careers and mobility of teacher educators;
13. implementing an ethical code for teacher educators;
14. encouraging participation in (international) networks;
15. implementing standards for teacher educators; and
16. developing a practical knowledge base for teacher educators.

What these 16 actions and measurements have in common is that they all contribute to a further improvement of the teacher educator profession. The first seven items on the list are typically actions and measures undertaken by governmental bodies, while the others are more likely to be conducted by the management of teacher education institutes or by teacher educators themselves. For example, the development of standards for teacher educators in the Netherlands was primarily the responsibility of VELON, the Dutch Association of Teacher Educators (Koster & Dengerink, 2001).

The issue of how to position teacher educators in the discourse on new professionalism has not been fully addressed and in our view deserves more attention. This study intends to address this issue and contributes to our understanding of the teacher educator profession by answering two questions:

1. What features of the professionalism of teacher educators are mentioned in the selected European documents?
2. Which measures and actions are proposed at the European policy level to encourage the professionalism of teacher educators?

4 Methodology

To answer both questions policy documents have been analysed to search for information on the status of this profession and for actions and measurements to improve teacher educators' professionalism. The study was restricted to the main European policy documents that consider the issues of teacher education from a European perspective. The following six documents were regarded as influential in the contemporary debate on these issues:

- Teachers Matter (OECD, 2005). This OECD publication addresses issues that are essential when it comes to attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers.
- Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (European Commission, 2005). This document from the European Commission is developed in the context of expert groups on themes from the Education & Training agenda of the Commission. The document identifies common principles with respect to teacher competencies and qualifications, aiming to support member states to develop their own teacher policy.
- Improving the Quality of Teacher Education (European Commission, 2007).
- The Council Conclusions (European Council, 2007) which summarises the main findings of some previous documents and formulates directions and conclusions for the further development of teacher education in Europe.
- The Quality of Teachers (ATEE, 2006). In this policy paper the Association of Teacher Education in Europe contributes to the debate on teacher standards through seven recommendations on the identification of indicators for teacher quality.
- Teacher Education in Europe (ETUCE, 2008). This policy paper from the European Trade Union Committee for Education presents ETUCE's vision of teacher education in the 21st century.

The procedure for the analysis consisted of a search within the documents using teacher educator(s) as search terms. Fragments were selected that contained these search terms and then they were examined by at least two researchers. For this purpose, a classification scheme was developed to assist the researchers in sorting the text fragments. This scheme consisted of the actions and measures as discussed in the previous section.

5 Findings

With regard to the first research question, the analysed documents only mentioned four statements concerning the current status of the profession of teacher educators. Yet a closer inspection of these four statements revealed that these statements did not really describe the current status of the profession, but were in fact statements about

desired developments for the coming years. Thus the documents did not offer any information about the current status of the teacher educator profession.

With regard to the second research question, Table 1 displays an overview of the findings of the analysis of the international documents. One of the documents “Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications” (2005) did not provide any information on teacher educators and is therefore excluded from the table.

Table 1. *Suggested actions and measurements expressed in European policy documents to enhance the professionalism of teacher educators*

Actions & Measures	Improving the quality of teacher education	Council conclusions on the quality of teacher education	Teachers Matter	ATEE policy paper on the quality of teachers	ETUCE policy paper on teacher education
1. Expressing concerns			pp. 108, 136		Entire document
2. Suggesting proposals		pp. 3-4			
3. Initiating research					
4. Advisory boards, committees					
5. Legislation					
6. Accountability systems					
7. Accreditation of Teacher Education programmes			p. 237		
8. Selection criteria					pp. 15, 34-36
9. Formal courses					
10. Induction programmes					
11. Resources and requirements CPD					pp. 34-36, 45

Table 1. Continue

12. Career and mobility		pp. 3-4			p. 50
13. Ethical code					
14. Professional networks	p. 15			p. 8	pp. 25, 34-36
15. Standards	p. 15			p. 8	pp. 34, 59
16. Practical knowledge base					pp. 36,60

Several documents clearly express concerns regarding teacher educators' professionalism. Especially the arguments in the ETUCE policy paper demonstrate that European trade unions feel a strong need to improve the quality of the staff of teacher educators across Europe. The OECD report expresses concerns that can be found in several reports:

A number of Country Background Reports expressed concerns about the approaches used in teacher education programmes. For example, the Norwegian report stated that "teacher educators have difficulty in giving their teaching a practical focus and relating pedagogical competence to the individual subject. Subject teachers say that students often do not understand that they are receiving instruction in didactics, while students have difficulty in seeing how what they learn in different subjects is linked to what they need to know in a practical, teaching situation." Norwegian teachers express similar concerns; research indicates that initial teacher education is not highly valued and that teachers commonly perceive a gap between theory and practice in teacher education (OECD, 2005, p. 108).

The ETUCE policy paper is the only document that clearly suggests actions related to the entry of the teacher educator profession:

Teacher educators should be able to provide student-centred education in close cooperation with other colleagues. As outlined in the previous chapter, the ETUCE emphasises that all teachers should be educated to Master's level in higher education and, of course, teacher educators must have the qualifications required to be able to teach at that level (ETUCE, 2008, p. 34).

While not clearly expressed, the ETUCE policy paper implies that if teachers need a master's degree then teacher educators need to possess a doctoral degree in order to be equipped to teach at master's level. The

ETUCE policy paper is also the only document that clearly addresses the theme of the further professional development of teacher educators:

In order to meet the demands placed on the profession, all teacher educators – including mentors at schools – should be given the opportunity to undertake proper lifelong learning of their own. Ongoing professional development is a must. Both time and financing should be made available. Agreements should be reached to allow sabbatical years for professional development. This must include provision for qualified replacement staff (ETUCE, 2008, p. 36).

Actions for career and mobility are expressed in two documents: the ETUCE policy paper and the document of the European Council, respectively. Both documents emphasise the need to perceive career and mobility not to a restricted national level but rather on a European scale:

Support mobility programmes for teachers, student teachers and teacher educators which are designed to have a significant impact on their professional development, as well as to foster better understanding of cultural differences and an awareness of the European dimension of teaching (Council Conclusions, 2007, p. 4).

Participating in professional networks is regarded as a strong impetus to improve teacher educators' professionalism. Text fragments regarding the need for networking were discovered in three documents that all point to the same advantages of networking as is clearly presented in the following fragment from the report of the Commission "Improving the quality of teacher education":

Links between teacher educators, practicing teachers, the world of work and other agencies need to be strengthened. Higher Education institutions have an important role to play in developing effective partnerships with schools and other stakeholders to ensure that their Teacher Education courses are based upon solid evidence and good classroom practice (Commission of the European Communities, 2007, p. 15).

The same three documents also suggest actions on the level of implementing standards for teacher educators and their suggestions are very comparable.

If we want teacher educators to be role models for their student teachers, then teacher educators should be explicit about their own professional quality, the indicators of this quality and the way they use them to develop

professionally in a systematic and self-regulated way. In this respect, teacher educators carry a heavy responsibility, as the quality of teacher educators affects not only the quality of teacher education and the learning of the student teachers, but also the attractiveness and the quality of the teaching profession and therefore the quality of the education that is provided to pupils.

The ATEE, as a professional community of teacher educators in Europe, will continue to stimulate communities of teacher educators to develop indicators of teacher educator quality within local or national contexts and to exchange such between their communities (ATEE, 2006).

All three documents imply that the development of standards is not a responsibility of nation states but that teacher educators themselves must take on the task of formulating standards for their own profession.

Finally, only one document makes reference to teacher educator quality as a possible criterion for the accreditation of teacher education programmes. The OECD report includes in its “framework for informing teacher policy” (OECD, 2005, 237) the issue of the accreditation and evaluation of initial teacher education programmes that also touch on the credentials and backgrounds of teacher educators.

6 Conclusions and discussion

In this paper we presented the findings of our analyses of policy documents about teacher education on an international level. The results indicate that references to teacher educators and their professionalism are not only limited but they also do not present the actual status of the professionalism of teacher educators. The only actual reference to teacher educators’ professionalism is phrased in terms of wishes and needs for teacher educators to further enlarge their professionalism. Therefore, the findings reported here are limited to our second research question concerning measures and actions to encourage the professionalism of teacher educators.

It is clear from the findings that the policy documents pay limited attention to teacher educators and their professionalism. If teacher educators are mentioned at all, it is to express concerns about their quality. With the exception of the ETUCE document, no concrete

suggestions have been made about improving the professionalism of teacher educators or to encourage their professional development. Various studies show that little attention is being paid to teacher educators in general (see, for instance, Smith, 2003; Swennen & Van der Klink, 2009) and that there should be more research into their learning and development (Loughran, 2006, Cochran-Smith, 2003).

The study presented here is a small-scale study. However, we made a thorough search for policy documents that were published in the European policy context and we are not aware of any other documents that play a significant role in the contemporary European debate on the quality of teacher educators.

To ensure an analysis that is as reliable as possible two researchers searched for text fragments about teacher educators and two researchers assigned the text fragments to items related to professionalism and the actions and measurements. The meaning of the outcomes was discussed by all three authors but the scarcity of text fragments mentioning anything about teacher educators limited the scope of the discussion.

The findings reported in this chapter encourage us to continue our research on teacher educators' professionalism in policy papers. As a next step we intend to focus on policy documents on the level of individual European member states that will allow us to investigate how national policy documents contribute to the professionalism of teacher educators in various countries.

We conclude that hardly any reference is made to teacher educators' professional development in European policy documents, which we find quite disturbing since there are good reasons to assume that the quality of teacher educators is one of the most prominent factors predicting the quality of teachers and thus indirectly contributes to the quality of our education systems. It is important that policymakers, researchers and teacher educators work together closely to develop concepts for the induction and further development of teacher educators as a specialised professional group.

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