

# Developing a pan-European approach to teacher educators' collaborative learning:

learning about, learning how and learning from

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores from an English perspective the outcomes of the InFo-TED\* Summer Academy: a pan-European attempt to encourage collaboration in professional development for teacher educators (see Conway et al., 2015; Czerniawski et al., 2017). In exploring the experience and outcomes of collaborative professional development through the InFo-TED project, we recognise that the diversity of teacher education routes in England and shifting policy landscapes (Murray et al., 2017) create salient opportunities to explore the

English context in line with European policy directives (Czerniawski et al., 2018; Vanassche et al., 2019) and the enacted and lived professional experiences of other European colleagues in this shifting field. To do this, this paper draws upon the auto-ethnographical reflections, vignettes and journals of Summer Academy participants, seeking to situate teacher educators' practices within the 'concrete context' of teacher education reform (Vanassche et al., 2015). Within this context, we argue, is the need for a returned attention to teacher educators' development.

## KEYWORDS

TEACHER EDUCATION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PROFESSIONALISM

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

## INTRODUCTION

This paper acknowledges that there is little existing research on the professional development needs of teacher educators (Murray et al., 2011; Smith, 2012; Berry, 2013) and that this is compounded in increasingly complex ways by the English ideological educational landscape (especially where the education and training of teachers is concerned). Rapid and widespread ideological policy changes to teacher education in England since 2010 from neoliberal Coalition and Conservative UK governments make ambiguous this context as a site to situate professional practice and professional learning for this occupational group (Orchard & Winch, 2015; Vanassche et al., 2019). In exploring this context, this paper reviews the local impact of a pan-European attempt to provide opportunities for teacher educator development, learning and knowledge exchange through the Summer Academy of the InFo-TED project. In this article we locate reflective accounts of Summer Academy participants within wider and recent calls for a renewed attention given to teacher educator professional development. In exploring the InFo-TED project and in writing this piece, we adopt, as authors, a range of complex positionalities – we are variously: experienced teacher educators; new to higher education; Summer Academy participants; and project conveners and InFo-TED Council members.

## THE POLYCONTEXTUAL REALITIES OF TEACHER EDUCATOR PRACTICE IN ENGLAND

In the existing English landscape, teacher educators come from a wide range of backgrounds but, typically, those working on Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses in higher education institutions (HEIs) are qualified school teachers, who undergo a career transition to move from their school-based contexts to assume academic roles at universities. Murray (2002) articulates

this as a movement from operating as a first-order practitioner (i.e. school teacher) to a second-order practitioner (i.e. teacher educator). with the academic discipline being the knowledge they bring of schooling, school systems and the experiential practice of working with learners in educational settings. This makes this occupational group in England a uniquely located group of 'second-order practitioners' (Murray & Male, 2005). The reasons for transitioning are varied: for example, Ellis et al. (2014) recognise the socially transformative nature of the work of teacher educators, citing strong commitments 'to sharing good practice', and 'seeing future generations of school children being well-taught' (p.23). Hall and Schultz (2003) cite teacher educators' desire to promote particular models of professionalism within the teacher education programmes they were working on. This positions teacher educators as gatekeepers to the wider teaching profession; they considered it their responsibility to 'practise what they preached', to 'embody the professional standards and values they considered should underpin school teaching' (p.370). Given the diversity of such individual stories, the teacher educator community is complex and rich. Yet, in the English context, teacher educators, despite these rich complexities and poly-contextualities, are nonetheless also frequently positioned as 'boundary-crossers' (Czerniawski et al., 2018; Vanassche et al., 2019) moving into the world of higher education from other professional sectors and roles (i.e. their previous 'first-order' teaching). This makes the InFo-TED project even more timely, as means to support a group otherwise little supported but also little/infrequently researched (Murray et al., 2011; Smith, 2012; Berry, 2013).

Our argument here is that this occupational transition (as 'boundary-crossers') necessitates the development of a new professional identity, which requires learning and assimilating the organisational norms and values of the institution. Elsewhere the

literature argues for a return or a reclaiming of teacher educator identity practices as a renewed and re-enacted professionalism (Vanassche et al., 2019). Previously, Murray & Male (2005) adopted Southworth's description of the situational self and the substantial self in their discussion of this boundary-crossing transition. The situational self develops as a result of interactions with others, whilst the substantial self is a composition of a core set of self-beliefs gained through general life experiences, which may or may not change over time. The authors consider the career transition to be complete when the two selves are closely aligned. At this point, which can take two to three years, the individual has developed greater levels of confidence and competence within the remit of their job specification, and they are able to carry out their role(s) with enhanced levels of ease and effectiveness. However, the process of professional socialisation, which also involves developing their HE subject pedagogy, can cause second-order practitioners to experience feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and a sense of being deskilled (Murray & Male, 2005). This pedagogic discomfort results in participants questioning their beliefs and assumptions, which may destabilise them and their view of the world. Despite this, the boundary-crossing in which first-to second-order practitioners engage carries huge potential for rich personal and professional learning (Yvonne Bain, InFo-TED website; Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). In the case of the InFo-TED project, these opportunities came through involvement in a week-long Summer Academy funded by an Erasmus+ bid to support teacher educator exchange.

## CONTEXT OF THE INFOTED PROJECT

The idea behind the wider InFo-TED project is that joint working is vital to support the sustained professional development of this uniquely located group of second-order practitioners. This joint working is essential for all, and of

benefit to all – established, novice and new entrants into teacher education. In the context of highly complex national contextual differences, the InFo-TED group sought to provide support for professional development ‘from within’ – teacher educators running opportunities for the professional development of other teacher educators. Formed in 2013, the cross-national collaboration *International Forum for Teacher Educator development* (InFo-TED) originally established itself with representatives from Belgium, England, Israel, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and the USA (see Conway et al., 2015). Funding for the group was established in autumn 2016 with a successful Erasmus+ bid to run a Summer Academy in 2018 for European teacher educators, both exploring and contributing to professional development needs. This face-to-face Summer Academy (eventually hosted by and held in Norway) was supported through an online community and a wider InFo-TED website, offering resources for teacher educators as well as an opportunity for colleagues in the field to contribute to knowledge generation and exchange. Within this context, we argue, is the need for a returned attention to teacher educators’ development. For this to happen, recognition is given to the complexities of teacher education practice and the diversity of its practice across national contexts. An expression of this diversity and complexity is articulated through the creation of an InFo-TED conceptual model which recognises that

*‘teacher educators’ practices are situated in the concrete context of the local teacher education institute and/or in the national or regional policy context. The local level refers to, for instance, the culture of the teacher education institute, the existing teacher education programs, or teacher education curricula. This level can also refer to relations with placement schools or other partnerships. The national level refers to national policy measurements,*

*existing frameworks, or standards for teacher educators. Finally, teacher educators’ practices are situated in a global level stressing their relation with supranational and societal change.’* (Vanassche et al., 2015)

## TEACHER EDUCATOR VOICES – VOICES FROM THE FIELD

In this paper on the need for further reformed and reclaimed teacher educator learning opportunities, we can explore, with an auto-ethnographical voice, our own involvement in the InFo-TED Summer Academy. To do this, we present below our ‘voices from the field’ – our reflections as Summer Academy participants:

### V.S.

*In 2018, I attended the Academy of the International Forum for Teacher Educator Development (Info-TED) – an initiative to develop a knowledge base for the professional development of teacher educators. The forum established in 2012, comprising of leading teacher educators from Belgium, Israel, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, England, Australia, Scotland and the United States, had created and published a conceptual model that underpinned this knowledge base (Conway et al., 2015; Info-TED, 2015; Vanassche et al., 2015). The forum, in its efforts to translate the knowledge base into an international professional development programme, had secured European Commission (ERASMUS+) funding to develop a Summer Academy, in Trondheim Norway, for teacher educators from around the world. On the one hand, I was understandably quite excited on being offered this chance as this was my first foray into this sort of supportive professional development. The learning opportunities offered by this programme were extremely enticing and additionally the very idea of going on an expense paid trip to the ‘Land of*

*the midnight sun’ was like a dream come true. I couldn’t wait to see sun shining in the middle of the night! On the other hand, however, I was also quite nervous as I didn’t know what I was expected to do at this Academy and there was some apprehension that I wouldn’t measure up against the calibre of the other research intensive international fellow attendees.*

### A.M.

*In June last year, I was given the opportunity to go the InfoTed Summer School in Norway. At that point, I had been working in my current organisation (a university) for two months as co-head of Teacher Education. This was a very new position for me having previously worked in a Further Education College for many years. Whilst there, I had had several roles at both middle and senior leadership levels, and I had never done anything like this before, so I was excited and pleased to have been given the opportunity but, at the same time, apprehensive as I had no idea what to expect. On balance, I think the former outweighed the latter. Having spent some time reflecting on my experience, I would say that I learned something about myself as a practitioner, about what professional development can look like and, really importantly, I met so many excellent practitioners from whom I learned a lot*

### V.S.

*My fears were soon allayed as I found the whole week inspiring, offering a rare chance and time to reflect on my own professional journey, which for me was the crossing over from being a teacher to a teacher educator in HE. We shared storylines in our own allocated groups which comprised of three teacher educators from Norway, one from Scotland, one from Denmark and two from Israel. I realised that although we all were, in varying capacities, second order practitioners involved in teacher education, we*

*all came from diverse professional backgrounds and contexts. We all seemed to have entered teacher education at different points of our careers with different experiences and had identified different learning needs in our storylines. The session on how teacher educators confront their own vision and identity exposed us to the 'zipper' analogy for bringing together the theory and practice. I realised that our professional backgrounds and spatial contexts influences our interpretation of the content or the theory of the professional development sessions. In order to merge the theory into practice, I would need to zip them together, so professional learning requires a conscious action to be taken i.e. enacting on what I took away from the sessions. If zipping is enacting the professional learning, then would a zipper jam be such a bad thing? The jam results from conflict, unease, problematisation and brings us to a pedagogical discomfort triggering a heightened self-awareness and close reflection. I can learn so much during this discomfort as I put in all my energy to solve the problem, which is to make the zipper work. This part of the learning could possibly involve disconnecting from my previous learning and starting afresh. Isn't this the same for our student teachers too? What they take away from our professional sessions varies depending on their interpretive framework and as teacher educators, surely, we can support them explicitly in taking conscious action on it i.e. help them in zipping up.*

## PROFESSIONALISM AND TEACHER EDUCATION: A RENEWED PERSPECTIVE

The presumption that you can be a good teacher educator if you were a good teacher permeates the education system in England. This is not the case, as most teacher educators struggle to develop professional confidence and to access the

knowledge base for teacher education (Murray, 2008b; Swennen et al., 2009).

### A.M.

*Firstly, in order for learning that is both meaningful and developmental to take place, it doesn't have to be formalised; by that I mean, it doesn't need to result in a qualification, certificate or a number of credits. During the week, we engaged in lots of really interesting workshops around themes such as professionalism, identity and professional development with the whole group. A part of each day was spent with our 'focus' group discussing the themes and capturing our ideas in a poster that was to be presented at the end of week in a shared forum. The most valuable aspect of this was the opportunity to interact with peers from a wide range of professional backgrounds and contexts: the fact that the groups were internationally mixed made it all the more interesting. Each of these participants brought something unique in terms of experience, insight or ideas and each was equally respected by the group. There were a few frustrating moments; just as we thought we had completed our poster for the presentation, another idea was brought to the table and we had to rethink and reconceptualise what we wanted to say. However, this turned out to be part of the richness of the experience. Secondly, irrespective of their role in an organisation, level of experience, or academic background those professionals who are involved in the education of teachers are unique, and all have something to contribute to an evolving body of knowledge on teacher identity and professionalism. The interactions I had with participants through the week showed me that we were all part of a community of practice in which each had something to learn from another. For me, some of the best learning takes place when people work together collaboratively with a common purpose, and everyone's opinions are respected.*

### V.S.

*At the Summer Academy, we too experienced the zipper jam when we struggled to agree on a research project to be presented to all on the last day. Even though there were opportunities for rich dialogue, we all became frustrated at our lack of progress. As a group we all experienced this discomfort, which heightened our focus and reflections. In fact, our scrutiny increased to such a level that the animated discussions continued during our leisurely walk back to the hotel through the quiet, picturesque countryside in the glorious sunshine. I treasure these valuable opportunities through which I learnt so much about the diverse practices of my new friends. Wasn't this a professional learning too? It was not surprising that these informal discussions identified our mutual professional development need which later translated into our research question: How can integration or technology enhance teacher educators? Under expert guidance our ideas and thoughts were packed into a multi-stage research project. If teacher educators are allocated a professional research mentor, early on in their career, then they too can be similarly supported to develop their knowledge base. Participating in the Summer Academy provided me with the support for professional development. As teacher educators we juggle different roles and heavy workloads making it difficult to find time for our own professional development. Furthermore, policy interventions and accountability measures place more focus on performativity, thus taking away the focus from research. Development of knowledge bases through research and professional development activities would not only enhance teacher educator's practice but also enrich the student teachers learning experience.*



**A.M.**

*There should always be a place in our busy work lives for our own personal and professional development. This is not only key to our growth as individuals, but also for the trainees we work with, who should benefit from the knowledge that can be gained through research, and related scholarly activity. In addition to this, I think much rich learning happens in situ when, for example, colleagues discuss the progress of a trainee in a staffroom or the best approach to use in a teaching session. Situated learning such as this happens socially and relies on the contributions from others. I am conscious that we are teacher educators, but we are also researchers, managers, mentors, observers, colleagues, teachers/lecturers, trainers and, in this context, summer school participants. The point here is that we have multiple identities, which often overlap and can at times create a 'pedagogy of discomfort'. However, although being out of one's comfort zone can feel uncomfortable, it can lead to a lot of learning. At the end of the week, we were asked to make a short video in which we were to reflect on the week. I found this quite hard to do not least because I don't like being videoed, but also because it was difficult to condense the wealth of knowledge and experiences into two minutes.*

Teacher educators need professional development, as they do not undergo any training for their job (Smith, 2003; Vanassche et al., 2019). Findings from an InFo-TED international study (Czerniawski et al., 2017) identify teacher educators' needs for professional learning on developing: research skills, academic writing, publishing research, use of digital technologies and pedagogy. Professional learning can occur through both formal and informal activities, and opportunities should be provided to both school- and HE-based teacher educators throughout their careers, to develop their learning and improve their professional practice (Czerniawski, 2018).

## RECLAIMING TEACHER EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Czerniawski (2018) defines teacher educators as 'all who are professionally engaged in the initial and ongoing education of teachers, including those who work in universities, colleges and schools'. As teacher educators influence the learning of student teachers, it is important to ensure and raise the quality of their work, leading to wider improvements in education (Snoek et al., 2011). In England there seems to be little explicit policy, either to define what is meant by the quality of teacher education, or the professional development required of teacher educators (Murray & Harrison, 2008). There is a lack of clarity and certainty about the knowledge bases required for teacher educators, and this is, sometimes further complicated by the existence of multiple models of teacher education within a single cultural setting (Korthagen et al., 2005; Murray, 2008a; Back, 2012). Teacher educators commencing their careers experience feelings of inadequacy which are compounded by the lack of clarity about their role(s) and the associated competences, especially around research. Growing research on this issue has increased awareness of the need for a robust teacher educator induction, yet it is still often informal and unstructured, and occurs 'by immersion', through informal teaching and research activities in the workplace (Murray, 2008b). The programme should provide experience of a range of integrated tasks and settings while allowing for time for self-reflection. Coherent induction programmes should also include personal and social support, possibly by provision of a mentoring system, an expert system, a peer system and a self-reflection system (European Commission, 2010). New entrants, especially those coming from schools, find the expectations of doing research daunting. The allocation of a professional mentor to help them to develop their skills in researching and

publishing would be beneficial. In order to develop professional confidence, the induction should include activities that enhance knowledge and understanding of adult learning, highlighting aspects of being a teacher in higher education.

## INFO-TED YEAR ONE: DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONAL LEGACY

Teacher educators can be viewed as public professionals standing at the foreground of their subject areas and hence need to be involved in a constant dialogue between theory, practice and research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2005; Furlong et al., 2009). It is necessary to consistently provide new and experienced teacher educators with personalised tailor-made opportunities, as seen in the InFo-TED example here, to reflect and to develop their professional qualities. More needs to be done to develop the professional development activities that take place in the 'third space': inclusion of activities that facilitate understanding and development of practitioner research or HE- and school-based teacher educator collaborative action-based research would develop the knowledge base about teacher educators' teaching and learning experiences. In our own words,

**V.S.**

*Participating in the InFo-Ted sessions has widened my existing knowledge base and enabled me to reflect on my practice from a more informed perspective. Similarly, for teacher educators such opportunities for collaborating with fellow colleagues, especially those who have more experience than them, presents a unique opportunity to form micro-communities of practice in which they can share interests, discuss concerns and reflect. This would alleviate some of the initial feelings of inadequacy that are common amongst teacher educators. In an institution, the inclusion of a robust programme for*

*induction activities and for continuous professional development will improve teacher educators own professional practice throughout their careers and hence will lead to better quality and experiences of their student teachers.*

Central to the development of a professional identity is the need for new teacher educators to engage in professional learning that supports their induction into university contexts and pedagogies, and continuing professional development. We have positioned this as an issue of 'boundary-crossing'. Some key themes prevail in our reflections on InFo-TED Summer School participation: the role of and importance of research and scholarly activity, and formal and informal situated learning opportunities.

#### A.M.

*It is nearly a year since I participated in InFo-TED. During that time, I have developed more confidence in my new role and an understanding of its overlapping complexities. I am aware of the journey I am on to developing a new professional identity that reflects the nature of higher education. To support this, and to develop my skills, I am currently undergoing professional formation with external accreditation bodies. I am also just about to start the process of applying for Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy status. In July, a colleague and I will do a conference presentation at another university into the expansion of the teacher education provision at our university as a means by which to widen participation for non-traditional learners. I have also just been accepted as an External Examiner at a university in the south of England. Overall, I feel I have been making inroads into engaging in personal and professional development, and am beginning to understand what a HE professional identity can look like.*

Situated informal learning opportunities may present themselves when, for example, practitioners benefit from

support provided by departmental colleagues or a mentor when discussing teaching and learning approaches, or a student teacher's progress in a staffroom; or by shadow-marking an assignment with an experienced colleague. In this way, new teacher educators begin to engage in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the learning of which may be unintentional, but meaningful nonetheless. Formal learning opportunities may be provided by, for example, participating in an accredited programme such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching and Learning. A participant in a longitudinal study carried out by Harrison & McKeon (2008) recognised a shift away from an identity of 'subject teacher' toward 'teacher of subject teacher' and the impact that had on the development of his academic and professional identity. Finally, it is important to recognise that new second-order practitioners are likely to need support to develop their research skills.

## CONCLUSION

In England, the Coalition Government rapidly overhauled teacher education in 2010. The political and ideological view of teaching as a craft has increased the prevalence of school-centred teacher education, opening the market of ITE to new providers. The HE teacher educators find themselves 'brokering' deals with schools in order to increase recruitment and 'to stay in the business'. Teacher educators are under accountability pressure to get their student teachers to be classroom-ready. This has led to focus shifting from teacher education being a research-based profession to that of a skill acquisition activity, hence undermining the value of the universities' contributions to ITE. In the light of this landscape, claims in recent literature to reclaim professional identity and re-enact it are powerfully located (Vanassche et al., 2019). This positions opportunities for communal working and learning – such as that provided by InFo-TED – as essential

mechanisms through which to reclaim this need for professional development. In the words of one of our participants:

#### V.S.

*The Summer Academy sessions have been the most thought provoking and productive that I have attended in my seven years as a teacher educator. I am thankful for the hard work put in by the InFo-TED members and for their generous hospitality which enabled me to view my practice with a renewed perspective.*

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on the wider InFo-TED collaboration can be found here: <http://info-ted.eu/>

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