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## The Professional Teacher Educator: Six Roles

Jurriën Dengerink, Mieke Lunenberg and Fred Korthagen

**Abstract** The profession of teacher educators is substantially different from the teaching profession. The transition from being a teacher to becoming a teacher of teachers and a researcher is considered to be a key element in the development of a teacher educator. Therefore, it is not surprising that the professional roles «teacher of teachers» and «researcher» play a prominent role in the results of a literature review we conducted on the profession of teacher educators. This review also shows that four other roles of teacher educators can be identified: «coach», «curriculum developer», «gatekeeper» and «broker».

**Keywords** teacher educator – professional role – professional development

### Berufsbild «Lehrerbildnerin/Lehrerbildner»: Sechs Rollen

**Zusammenfassung** Der Beruf der Lehrerbildnerinnen und Lehrerbildner unterscheidet sich wesentlich vom Lehrberuf. Deshalb stellt der Übergang von der Lehrperson zur Lehrerin bzw. zum Lehrer von Lehrpersonen wie auch zur Forscherin bzw. zum Forscher ein Schlüsselement in der Entwicklung von Lehrerbildnerinnen und Lehrerbildnern dar. Es ist daher nicht verwunderlich, dass diesen beiden beruflichen Rollen in den Ergebnissen einer Literaturrecherche, die wir zum Berufsbild der Lehrerbildnerin bzw. des Lehrerbildners durchgeführt haben, eine herausragende Bedeutung zukommt. Gleichwohl vermochte unsere Studie auch noch vier weitere Rollen von Lehrerbildnerinnen und Lehrerbildnern herauszuarbeiten: «Mentorin/Mentor», «Lehrplanentwicklerin/Lehrplanentwickler», «Pfortnerin/Pfortner» und «Vermittlerin/Vermittler».

**Schlagwörter** Lehrerbildnerin/Lehrerbildner – berufliche Rolle – berufliche Entwicklung

## 1 Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, increasing attention has been given to the crucial role of teacher educators in educational practice, research and policy (Koster, Brekelmans, Korthagen & Wubbels, 2005). Especially during the past ten years, many publications shed light on aspects of the profession of teacher educators. However, until recently a systematic overview of what is known about this profession was lacking. This article is based on an extensive review study, based on peer-reviewed articles, that we conducted (Lunenberg, Dengerink & Korthagen, 2014). The goal of the review study was to arrive at a solid overview of what is known about (1) the professional roles of teacher educators and their related professional behaviour, and (2) the professional development of teacher educators regarding these roles and the accompanying behaviour. Hence,

in this article we present some key findings by seeking to answer the following two questions:

1. What are and what characterises the professional roles of teacher educators and their associated professional behaviour?
2. What characterises the development of teacher educators regarding their professional roles and their associated professional behaviour?

In this study we define a *professional role* as a personal interpretation of a position based on expectations from the environment and on systematically organised and transferable knowledge (De Jager, Mok & Sipkema, 2004). By *professional behaviour* we mean behaviour which is based on a systematically organised, transferable knowledge base and in which the values of the profession are reflected (Verloop, 2001).

Teacher educators are a heterogeneous group. Not only do they come from different backgrounds (most of them were teachers and being in teacher education is a second career; others directly enter teacher education after a PhD-study at university), but they also work in different settings (Lunenberg, 2010). There is a growing group of school-based teacher educators co-operating with university-based teacher educators and their students (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Van Velzen & Volman, 2009). Some teacher educators have a school-subject as their main field of interest; others have a background in pedagogy or psychology.

Teacher educators are increasingly expected to support continuing professional development of teachers and to conduct research themselves (Koster, Dengerink, Korthagen & Lunenberg, 2008). Such combinations of roles may be a source of tensions and conflict, because one has to meet different, sometimes difficult to reconcile, expectations and standards. In this study we use a broad definition of teacher educators: *all those who teach or coach (student) teachers with the aim of supporting their professional development* (European Commission, 2013).

## 2 Method

We followed the eight steps for doing a review study described by Randolph (2009; a more elaborate description of the method can be found in Lunenberg, Dengerink & Korthagen, 2014). We documented the whole process carefully, defined the focus of the study, and searched systematically for literature (steps 1 to 3). The terms we used in our search were «teacher educator», «teacher trainer» and «mentor teacher». A search with the search engines «Web of Knowledge», «Science Direct» and «Tandfonline» resulted in a body of 1262 articles for the period 1991–2011 (before 1991 hardly any studies on teacher educators had been published). We then selected 405 of these articles on the basis of the reading of the abstracts. The criteria were (1) quality – we have limited ourselves to articles in journals recognised by the Institute for Scientific Information

(ISI) and the Dutch Interuniversity Centre for Educational Sciences (ICO) – and (2) anticipated relevance to answering our questions. These 405 articles we read entirely. Not all articles turned out to have a focus on teacher educators, as some only referred to implications for teacher educators in the conclusions or in the discussion section. This led to a restriction to 136 articles. These articles formed the database of our study (steps 4 and 5). While reading the articles we discovered that in some studies roles were named and described explicitly, but that the same descriptions in these studies did not lead to the same name and vice versa, while other studies only presented abstract descriptions. Discussions among the three researchers led to the identification of six roles. Since after reading fifty articles more closely no new roles could be found, conceptual saturation had been reached. In order to increase the validity, two of us subsequently analysed the data for each of the six roles (step 6). Every three weeks we discussed the progress and possible alternative interpretations of our findings (step 7). Finally, we asked seven critical friends, experts from different countries in this field, to comment on the draft report (step 8). We asked them specifically to respond to the reliability and transparency of the method used and to the degree of completeness of our selection.

As mentioned above, our review study included studies until 2011. After that, research about being and developing (as) a teacher educator has continued and has settled itself as a recognisable domain within teacher education research (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015, p. 13). Several interesting studies have been published since 2012. Where relevant, we will refer to these too.

### **3 Six Roles**

On the basis of our study, six roles of teacher educators have been identified:

1. teacher of teachers,
2. researcher,
3. coach,
4. curriculum developer,
5. gatekeeper (responsible for admission to the teaching profession),
6. broker (responsible for the connection between school and teacher education institute).

What is known about these six professional roles and their associated professional behaviour varies considerably. This difference is even more striking when we look at the knowledge about the professional development related to the roles. Based on the literature selected by us, only for three of the six roles we can report on the features defining the professional development. In the following sections, we present a selection of our findings for each role.

### 3.1 Teacher of Teachers

#### **Role and behaviour**

By far, most research has been carried out on the role of the teacher of teachers. Well-known is the distinction that Murray and Male (2005) draw between *first and second order teaching*. They emphasise that the teacher of teachers does not teach pupils, but (prospective) teachers in a higher education setting. Research shows that most teacher educators share this view of second order teaching, but how and the extent to which they put this vision into practice leaves a lot to be desired. Second order teaching requires a specific pedagogy of teacher education, of which «modelling» («teach as you preach», «walk your talk») and explicating are important aspects (Loughran & Berry, 2005). This involves that teacher educators can reflect on their own actions and feelings and make them explicit, in order to support the development of (prospective) teachers. A final important aspect of the role of a teacher of teachers is the ability to handle tensions and dilemmas, for example between telling and growth (Berry, 2009). This requires that teacher educators have solid theoretical knowledge, experience and judgment. By always trying to find the right balance in these tensions, the teacher educator fulfils the role of a teacher of teachers.

#### **Professional development**

These findings raise the question of what can promote teacher educators' professional development in this role. Presence of a frame of reference as well as a professional standard and a knowledge base prove to be important (Shagrir, 2010). Examples of frames of reference for teacher educators are the American standard of the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE, 2008), the Dutch professional standard of the Association of Teacher Educators in the Netherlands (Koster & Dengerink, 2001; revised version VELON, 2012) and the Flemish «Ontwikkelingsprofiel» (Developmental Profile) of the Association of Teacher Educators in Flanders, Belgium (VELOV, 2012; revised version Mets & Van den Hauwe, 2015). Also personal characteristics of teacher educators are important, such as curiosity and interest in their work and their students. Furthermore, professional development activities that link up with (gaps in) prior knowledge and experience contribute to teacher educators' professional development. Teacher educators have a preference for learning from and with colleagues on an informal basis, but also through peer coaching, by participating in colloquia and conferences, and in learning communities. While assigning a mentor to novice teacher educators occurs frequently, in practice the support given to these mentors turns out to be limited (Harrison & McKeon, 2008). The existence of and research on courses for teacher educators is still scarce (Shagrir, 2010). What also turns out to be productive for the professional development as a teacher of teachers is studying one's own practice (Zeichner, 2007). This brings us to the second role.

## 3.2 Researcher

### **Role and behaviour**

The attention given to the role of the teacher educator as a researcher is growing strongly. It turns out that the idea that teacher educators – should – conduct research is worldwide increasingly shared by institutions of higher education, not only by research universities, but also by polytechnics and colleges – the so-called new universities (Murray, Czerniawski & Barber, 2011). However, among teacher educators there is no consensus on whether they have to fulfil the role of a researcher and – if that should be the case – what this role involves: is it about reading literature, supervising research students or conducting research? And if it is expected that the teacher educator conducts research, what should be the focus: the (school) subject, teaching and learning in primary or secondary education, or their own practice? This variety is accompanied by a debate about the goals, methods and quality criteria, especially regarding teacher educators' research into their own practice. Tack and Vanderlinde (2014) discern three categories of teacher educators/researchers: «enquiring teacher educators», «well-read teacher educators» and «teacher educator-researchers».

### **Professional development**

In our study we found three clusters of factors contributing to the professional development of teacher educators as researchers. First, creating a supportive environment in which a supporting research culture is created, where institutional expectations and requirements are explicit, where time, information and support are offered, and cooperation is encouraged is of great interest (Griffiths, Thompson & Hryniewicz, 2010). Second, personal qualities of the teacher educator, such as motivation, passion and determination, are important (Gemmel, Griffiths & Kibble, 2010). Finally, it appears that reporting on one's own research, making it public and receiving forms of remuneration encourages a teacher educator's professional development in the researcher role (Lunenberg, Zwart & Korthagen, 2010).

## 3.3 Coach

### **Role and behaviour**

The study by Wold, Young and Risko (2011) shows that (prospective) teachers consider the coaching role of their teacher educators as most influential. The essential aspects of this role are openness, accessibility, enthusiasm, passion, forgiveness, inspiration, respect, helpfulness, integrity, and being generous and open-minded. The vast majority of studies we found in our review focus on the mentor supporting the student at school. Because more responsibility for teaching prospective teachers is reallocated to the schools, the traditional tasks of mentors are extended and they are expected to become school-based teacher educators. But too often mentor teachers still restrict their guidance to advisory work and to introducing student teachers to local school practice (Rajuan, Beijaard & Verloop, 2010). What proves to be hard is making their

own teaching behaviour and the underlying thinking explicit (Van Velzen & Volman, 2009), asking questions, and stimulating discussion and reflection (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen & Bergen, 2011).

### **Professional development**

Professional development that is focussed on coaching skills, explicating one's own behaviour, encouraging reflection and giving productive feedback proves to be productive. Also participation in – facilitated – learning communities (in which inquiry and research into one's own practices are central) is an effective form of support (Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen & Bergen, 2010). Aspfors and Fransson (2015) stressed the importance of a systematic, long-term and research-informed mentor education, which is well-situated in the specific context, and addresses theoretical and analytical skills, reflection and relational dimensions. To establish these professional development opportunities for school-based teacher educators, a close partnership between school and university is needed. We return to this aspect in the section on the broker role.

## **3.4 Curriculum Developer**

### **Role and behaviour**

The development of a curriculum for teacher education is the subject of a relatively large amount of studies, especially curriculum development in collaboration with schools. However, closer analysis reveals that only few articles have the teacher educator as a curriculum developer as their object of (self-)study. Teacher educators have to take into account that they work in contexts with different prevailing conceptions of teacher education, e.g. realistic teacher education (Korthagen, Loughran & Russell, 2006), competence-based teacher education (Struyven & De Meyst, 2010), or a teacher-education curriculum built around core practices (Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009). Also conceptions of whether a curriculum should be «research-led», «research-oriented», «research-based» or «research-informed» differ. Research also shows what the role of the curriculum developer means in practice. Blaise and Elsdon-Clifton (2007), focusing on changes in their curriculum (introduced as a result of government policy propagating competence-based teacher education), report on the resistance of students against what these students experienced as time-consuming work in groups with unequal partners. Other studies (Kosnik & Beck, 2008; Willemse, Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2005) show that teacher educators participating in curriculum renewal focus mainly on developing content for the curriculum part for which they are individually responsible.

We found no studies on the professional development of teacher educators in the role of curriculum developers.

### 3.5 Gatekeeper

#### **Role and behaviour**

In the role of a gatekeeper the teacher educator is monitoring the access of the student to the teaching profession. The yardstick by which teacher educators measure the future teacher is mostly determined by defined standards and profiles, based on teacher competencies (Struyven & De Meyst, 2010). The emphasis on constructivist concepts led to a wide use of portfolios in teacher education, assuming that this promotes active learning. Several studies deal with the teacher educator as an assessor of portfolios. These studies (Smith, 2007, 2010; Tillema & Smith, 2007) reveal considerable uncertainty about what a portfolio should contain and about the purpose (formative and/or summative). Also the validity and reliability of the assessment is questionable. Tillema and Smith (2007) relate this to the tension that teacher educators experience between their role as coaches and their role as gatekeepers. However, the summative function of assessment is crucial to protecting education from incompetent teachers (Smith, 2007). Because of the shift of responsibilities from universities to schools, the role of the school-based teacher educator becomes increasingly important. Research by Smith (2010) shows that it is not obvious that school-based teacher educators and students agree on the focus of the feedback of the mentor and the quality criteria the student should meet.

We found no studies on professional development in the gatekeeper role.

### 3.6 Broker

#### **Role and behaviour**

University-based and school-based teacher educators are increasingly sharing responsibility for the education and the development of (prospective) teachers. This calls for teacher educators who are able to shape this cooperation process. He (2009) introduced the term «broker» for this role, which is often carried out in the context of a community of learners (Wenger, 1998).

Erickson, Brandes, Mitchell and Mitchell (2005) cite the following success factors of such a community: long-term partnership in a safe structure, agreement on principles and objectives, meeting the needs of the participants, taking into account different orientations of the participants, and availability of time and resources. Martin, Snow and Torrez (2011) come to the conclusion that creating a «third space» comprising teacher educators in both school and university is important to link the complex networks together. In the third space, a new joint culture can be developed and relationships can be redesigned. Carroll (2005) mentions as important activities of a broker: focusing the common attention to specific questions or topics, (supporting) thinking aloud, and summarizing and consolidating jointly developed insights and products.

### **Professional development**

We found only a few studies on the professional development in the broker role. Bullough, Draper, Smith and Birrell (2004) and Williams (2014) stress the importance of identity formation and relationship building. Considering the increasing cooperation between schools and universities, this is an interesting and urgent research field.

## **4 Discussion**

Our review study shows that teacher educators have to perform a variety of roles, which they have to realise in a context with often competing demands. These competing demands increase when academia and schools bring in their own quality requirements, and stress also the need for cooperation between academia and school. Crossing boundaries and creating a hybrid new third space where teachers, faculty, and students engage as multiple meaning makers requires being rooted in academic research as well as in school practice. To deal with all these roles and demands requires scholarship in a broad sense.

### **4.1 Implications for Research**

The results show that existing research is unevenly distributed and has a variety of foci. Solid quantitative studies are almost absent. We may conclude that there is a beginning of an empirical basis for the professional behaviour of teacher educators in their main roles as teachers of teachers, researchers and coaches. Regarding the increasing body of self-studies of teacher educators in this field, more attention should be paid to «going beyond the story» (Loughran, 2010), and situating small-scale studies in a broader context. For the other roles even more research is needed.

Relatively many studies deal with the actual behaviour of teacher educators, but they also show that their behaviour is often problematic, as a result of the (often competing) demands and the limited use of existing research. Also studies on what is effective in the induction and the further professional development of teacher educators are still scarce.

### **4.2 Implications for Practice**

Teacher educators should be well-prepared for their responsible roles. During their career they need to have opportunities to extend their scholarship. Critical factors for initial education and professional development are (a) the availability of frames of reference and the opportunity to construct a personal and relevant professional frame of reference related to this, (b) the personal characteristics or dispositions of the teacher educator (e.g. inquiry as a stance, Cochran-Smith, 2003), (c) the availability of workplace-related support (peer-coaching, participating in a learning community as well as more formal education like a special programme for teacher educators), and (d) (opportunities for) conducting research into their own practice. Addressing these critical

factors is not only the responsibility of teacher educators, but also of those who are responsible for teacher education at large.

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