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Teacher educators developing professional roles: Frictions between current and optimal practices

Abstract

This article reports on a study of the professional learning of Flemish teacher educators. In the first part, an exemplary survey was conducted in order to compile an inventory of the existing types of education initiatives for teacher educators in Flanders. An electronic survey was then conducted in order to identify the professional needs of teacher educators in Flanders. The third part of the study focused on how the professional learning of teacher educators can evolve throughout their careers. This topic was examined by organising focus groups with teacher educators at two international conferences for teacher educators. Flemish teacher educators devote considerable attention to professional learning, and they are able to meet their needs through the broad range of existing courses and programmes offered within the educational system. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in the alignment of professional learning with the needs and career stages of teacher educators.

Keywords: teacher educators, professional learning, professional roles, career stages, teacher education

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Introduction

Teacher educators play a crucial role in the educational process, and they act as significant catalysts in the process of optimising and maintaining high-quality education. To date, the importance of teacher educators has received insufficient emphasis by policy-makers (Swennen & van der Klink, 2008). Partly for this reason, it is often referred to as a hidden profession (Snoek, Swennen, & van der Klink, 2011). Professional associations of teacher educators aspire to call attention to this profession and improve the quality of professional practice. In Flanders, the Policy Evaluation Committee for Teacher Education (in Dutch, Commissie Beleidsevaluatie Lerarenopleiding) (2013) concluded that the profession of ‘teacher educator’ remains under-acknowledged in governmental policies. For this reason and supported by the Flemish government, the Professional Association of Teacher Educators Flanders (VELOV) issued a call to examine the professional learning needs of teacher educators and the modalities for teacher education programmes in Flanders. The purpose of

the study was to examine whether the professional practice of teacher educators in Flanders corresponds to their professional needs. To this end, it was necessary to map the existing professional practice, as well as the professional needs and appropriate professional methods related to the career stages of teacher educators. Because a teacher education program is both institute and school based, we have used a broad definition for teacher educators: teacher educators are all those who actively facilitate the (formal) learning of student teachers and teachers (European Commission, 2013).

Theoretical background

The teacher educator's professional identity and professional roles

Under the heading 'professional identity' of teacher educators, the uniqueness part of the professional practice of teacher educators is brought together (Vanassche, 2016). Developing one's professional identity as a teacher educator is constructed over time (Dinkelman, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006, p. 6). Professional roles as a teacher educators could form a shared basis for developing a professional identity as a teacher educator. A review study of the profession of teacher educator (Lunenberg, Dengerink, & Korthagen, 2013) identifies six professional roles. The authors define a professional role as: “a personal interpretation of a position based on expectations from the environment and on a systematically organised and transferable knowledge base.” (p.6). These roles are as follows:

- Teacher of Teachers: Teacher educators provide second-order education: they teach future teachers. This presupposes knowledge about adult learning and how it can be promoted, as well as pedagogical content knowledge in which one's own actions and feelings are explicitly elucidated. An emphasis on congruence between the explicit and implicit messages of the teacher educator is thus a typical characteristic of the second-order teaching (Mets, Van den Hauwe, & Meeus, 2013). This imposes high demands on the professional actions and reflective ability of the teacher educator.
- Researcher: Although teacher educator's role as an investigator is becoming increasingly important (Dengerink, Lunenberg, & Kools, 2015), it has yet to become widely accepted. Moreover, its implementation is ambiguous. This role could involve the exchange of research results (Day, 1995), the preparation of joint publications (Shteiman, Gidron, Eilon, & Katz, 2010), the adoption of a stance of inquiry (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014) or

the conducting of practical research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kelchtermans, Vanassche, & Deketelaere, 2014; Lunenberg, Dengerink, & Korthagen, 2014; Murray, 2010).

- Coach: The role of the ‘internship supervisor’ includes the process of supporting the ability of students to learn from practical experience. This role is fulfilled by teacher educators in institutions, as well as by workplace counsellors appointed in the schools (hereinafter referred to as mentors). The role of the supervisor is perhaps the most influential (Wold, Young, & Risko, 2011). The personality or fundamental attitude of the teacher educator is regarded as being of crucial importance.
- Curriculum Developer: The role of the teacher educator as a curriculum developer is not performed as an individual, but in cooperation with fellow teacher educators or colleagues in schools. The extent to which this role comes into play thus depends largely on collective initiative. Whether implicitly or explicitly, the foundations of curriculum development are dependent upon their underlying educational philosophies (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009), and they represent the essential aspects of teaching around which the curriculum can be built. The course of the curriculum-development process and the implementation of the outcome are determined largely by the degree of consensus with regard to this philosophy.
- Gatekeeper: In the role of gatekeeper, a teacher educator makes decisions concerning access to the teaching profession. Summative assessment forms the heart of this role. Most countries currently have standards and profiles (cf. Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap [Ministry of the Flemish Community], 29/09/1998) that provide a framework for such assessment. Teacher educators translate these frameworks into concrete goals (qualitative criteria) and determine the ways in which they can be accomplished or pursued.
- Intermediary: Educational institutions and schools are jointly responsible for teacher education. Although they usually do not demonstrate any shared identity, these two parties share a common focus on the learning process of future teachers (Carroll, 2005). A new joint space is needed in which to pursue their shared goals (Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011). Ideally, the institutionally based teacher educator should take the initiative to assume the broker role, in order to facilitate interaction within this common space.

The development of professional identity throughout the career

The professional learning of teacher educators originates in their unfolding identities and the growing awareness of its uniqueness (Clemans, Berry, & Loughran, 2010). This professional identity can develop in breadth (expanding roles), depth (specialisation) or some combination of the two (Jasman, 2010). Teacher education nevertheless remains a complex and demanding profession. Within this context, professional learning does not necessarily follow a linear trajectory, being more likely to unfold through a combination of chain and network learning (Brody & Hadar, 2011; Kinchin & Cabot, 2010). The choices that teacher educators make with regard to enhancing their professionalism are therefore based the expertise they already acquired, as well as on their contextual needs. Teachers who become teacher educators face the challenge to let go of the identity of a teacher and focus on developing the identity of a teacher educator (Loughran, 2006).

To develop an identity as a knowledgeable skilled teacher educator, the induction phase is crucial, with responsibilities shared by the individual, the team and institution (Boyd & Harris, 2010). As noted by van Velzen, van der Klink, Swennen, & Yaffe (2010), novice teacher educators express little satisfaction with regard to the support and coaching that they receive during the induction phase. They emphasise the need for a formally structured induction with focus on ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘who’ they are as teacher educators. Active participation in learning communities, regular consultation with colleagues and coaching from experienced teacher educators would be of great value in the professional learning of beginning teacher educators (Shagrir, 2010). Elements that are regarded as beneficial in subsequent phases of professional learning include in-depth reflection on the teacher educator identity (McKeon & Harrison, 2010), discussion of pedagogical dilemmas (Yaffe & Maskit, 2010) and supportive practices within an active research culture (Griffiths, Thompson, & Hryniewicz, 2010). The elements above are part of the transfer, translation and transformation process of an early career teacher educator as described by Fehring and Rodrigues (2014).

For teacher educators, the likelihood of effective professional learning increases when there is constant interaction between individual professional learning and professional learning in teams (Barak, Gidron, & Turniansky, 2010). By discussing their own authentic teaching practices with fellow educators, teacher educators are able to connect their self-study to the development of a knowledge base within the educational community (Van Veen, Zwart, Meirink, & Verloop, 2010). One proven way of achieving this involves the establishment of professional learning communities within the programme team (Hadar & Brody, 2013). The effectiveness of these learning communities demands that the participants be open and are

willing to learn from each other's strengths and concerns by sharing constructive experiences with each other (Zellermayer & Margolin, 2005). Such communities could also include teacher educators, teachers and students (Gorodetsky & Barak, 2008; Silova, Moyer, Webster, & McAllister, 2010).

Education trajectories for teacher educators

The education of teacher educators can be subdivided according to the '3 I Model' (European Commission, 2010) in preparatory education (initial education), introductory support (induction education) and further professional support (in-service education). Unlike the firmly entrenched initial education that exists for teachers, there is no initial education for teacher educators. Nevertheless, teacher educators constitute a specific category of teachers: they are teachers of teachers (i.e. second-order teachers). In this capacity, teacher educators are subject to any expectations that apply to teachers. Teacher educators have less need for initial education, as it is intended to precede the execution of any actual tasks, which would be nearly impossible in practice. Most education opportunities for teacher educators consist of induction education and further professional support. The importance of such education has been endorsed by the European Commission (European Commission, 2012b). To date, formal induction and professional development courses specifically for teacher educators have remained relatively scarce in most European countries. Notable exceptions include significant initiatives that are being carried out in Estonia, Hungary, the Netherlands and Scotland (European Commission, 2012a).

Policies concerning professional learning can be successful only if the autonomy of the learner is guaranteed (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In the case of teacher educators, learning motivation is another prerequisite for an effective learning process. Given their major social responsibility, teacher educators could be expected to take an active role in their own learning (Vloet & van Swet, 2010). Policy should therefore take the professional learning preferences of individual teacher educators into account. Research suggests that these preferences often fall upon various forms of informal learning, which is often characterised by implicit, less tangible character (Tynjala, 2008). Examples include spontaneous initiatives in practice, moments of mutual reflection with colleagues concerning practice and feedback from students.

Method

This research was mainly conducted within the context of two types of initial teacher education in Flanders. These types include Bachelor programmes with a professional orientation (180 ECTS) embedded in university colleges and post-graduate programmes (60 ECTS) embedded in Centres for Adult Education and Universities. In Flanders, the professional field is advocating for support in the professional learning of teacher educators. However, a specific and structural policy on professional learning of teacher educators is not a reality in Flanders (Vlaamse overheid [Flemish Government], 2014). Institutions for teacher education are being challenged to develop autonomous a suitable and coherent policy on professional learning for their teacher educators. In this way opportunities for professional learning aims to become an integral part of ensuring quality in teacher education.

Except for the institution committed initiatives, teacher educators organise their professional learning on a voluntary base.

The purpose of the study was to examine whether the professional learning practice of teacher educators in Flanders corresponds to their professional learning needs.

To this end, a mixed method design was used to:

- Describe the current practice of professional learning for teacher educators in Flanders;
- Identify the professional needs of teacher educators in Flanders;
- Map the designated professional methodologies over the career phases of teacher educators.

Sub-study 1: Current professional learning practice for teacher educators in Flanders

Research Question 1: Who offers professional learning opportunities for teacher educators, and what is their share in the range of professional development offered?

Research Question 2: Which share is specifically intended for teacher educators?

Research Question 3: What is the content of the professional learning opportunities that organisations offer for teacher educators, and how does it relate to the various roles of the teacher educator?

Research Question 4: In which types of professional learning activities have teacher educators participated, and what was the duration of these activities?

Suppliers of professional learning were located through the identification of activities attended by teacher educators. Data were collected through an exemplary survey of three complete teams of teacher educators from two colleges and one centre for adult education (CVO) (N = 114). To identify the share of typical education opportunities for teacher educators, the activities were classified by primary audience. An inventory of the specific education opportunities offered for the professional learning of teacher educators in Flanders by the professional association (VELOV) and the five Flemish expertise networks (ENWs) was compiled through the analysis of annual reports, programme catalogues and websites. To determine how the course offerings related to the different roles within the professional identity of teacher educators, two researchers independently assigned the roles to the activities. Differences in coding were then discussed and allocated by consensus. Data concerning the various types of professional education were coded according to the classification of professional activities for teacher educators (Kools, 2014). Eight of the types of activities in which teacher educators indicate that they have learned were retained from this classification: reflection on and evaluation of one's own practice, supervision of students, participation in conferences, education trajectories, refresher courses and workshops, media, research and peer cooperation.

Sub-study 2: Professional learning needs of teacher educators in Flanders

Research Question 5: What kind of professional learning opportunities have teacher educators already received, and which forms of professional learning were used?

Research Question 6: What and how do teacher educators prefer to learn?

Research Question 7: Which barriers to and incentives for professional learning exist in the perceptions of teacher educators?

Chain sampling through the networks of VELOV and the ENWs was used to identify and invite teacher educators across Flanders to participate in mainly largely quantitative online survey (Lime Survey), which builds upon an existing questionnaire (Kools, Dengerink, Melief, & Lunenberg, 2011). Refinement was based on previous experience, alignment on the identified roles of teacher educators and adjustment after feedback from critical friends (N = 17). The questionnaire consisted of three parts: (1) identification questions (personal professional data), (2) professional learning in the past two years (professional learning mode, content, time allocation, barriers and incentives) and (3) professional learning in the next two years (professional learning goals, content and methods). Only fully completed questionnaires

(N=248) were used in the description and summary of the data according to descriptive statistics.

Sub-study 3: Recommended professional learning strategies throughout the teacher educator's career

Research Question 8: How do learning needs change throughout the career of a teacher educator?

Research Question 9: Which initiatives meet these needs throughout the career?

Research Question 10: Which modes of learning opportunities would teacher educators like to have in order to ensure success in the process of professional learning?

In 2014, focus groups were organised at the conference of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) in Portugal and at the conference of the Association of Teacher Educators Netherlands (VELON). The purpose of these sessions was to identify the career development strategies that would be preferable throughout the careers of teacher educators.

At the ATEE conference, two focus groups were held with expert teacher educators from the Research and Development Center (RDC) for the Professional Development of Teacher Educators (N = 9). Participants in these sessions were from various European countries, Israel and China. Each focus group was presented with a career timeline (induction → beginning → professionals → expert), which the participants were asked to complete by listing professional needs (Research Question 8) and desirable professional learning activities in terms of content and of form (Research Questions 9 and 10). For each focus group, one participant made a brief report of important areas of agreement and disagreement.

The focus groups at the VELON congress consisted of Dutch teacher educators with various profiles (N = 120). The procedure was similar to that used for the session at the ATEE conference, although the large number of participants required several organisational changes. The participants were divided into 18 groups, which were dispersed across four different rooms, each with a supervisor. Each focus group consisted of about six teacher educators. Each of the focus groups was provided with a written schedule of guiding questions, two large sheets with a career timeline and self-adhesive note papers to support the discussion. The discussion was divided into three phases, corresponding to the three research questions. In

each focus group, one participant made a brief report of important areas of agreement and disagreement.

The discussions of 12 focus groups were recorded and transcribed, and extensive reports were made of the remaining sessions. All data were included and coded using ATLAS.ti. During the first coding phase, 'in vivo coding' and 'descriptive coding' were combined with analytical memos, in order to create greater depth and obtain a broader overview of the results. The coding scheme was derived from a listing of needs for professional learning, professional learning initiatives and modes from the literature and from the preceding sub-study. During the second coding phase, coding was refined, with a focus on categorisation into core themes. This process was driven by areas of agreement (consensus on the topic), areas of disagreement (opposing themes), the frequency (i.e. frequent or seldom) and intensity of comments, major ideas and relationships with other themes (Saldana, 2011).

Results

Sub-study 1: Current professional learning practice for teacher educators in Flanders

With regard to the suppliers and their respective shares of professional learning activities for teacher educators (Research Question 1), the teacher educators' own institutions accounted for the largest share of professional learning activities (46%). Professional associations (4%) and the ENWs (8%) together accounted for an additional 12% of such activities, with the remaining suppliers represented as follows: educational networks and training centres (9%), professional associations (9%), socio-cultural groups (9%), governmental structures (7%), commercial organisations (7%) and research organisations (1%).

Teacher educators enrol in professional learning opportunities primarily in the form of activities focused on the education of teachers (34%) or of lecturers in higher education (26%). These activities focus predominantly on specific content knowledge and the use of ICT. They also enrol in education for mixed groups (21%) and for educational (or other) researchers (1%). The number of activities designed specifically for teacher educators (Research Question 2) is relatively limited (18%).

The teacher educator organisations have developed their own range of professional learning opportunities (Research Question 3). For example, VELOV organises professional learning activities through its professional development profile, as well as through the initial support it provides to beginning teacher educators and its supervision of coaches. The professional

association organises and facilitates peer discussions (learning communities) and the exchange of research results (conference, research journal). The educational opportunities offered by the ENWs focus primarily on the teacher educator as a second-order teacher (47%) and, to a lesser extent, on the teacher educator as a researcher (18%). Professional learning through coaching (9%) is supplied primarily in the form of education to help mentors (school-based teacher educators) to guide future teachers in the teaching practice. Relatively few activities focus on professional learning in the form of fundamental attitude (6%) or on the teacher educator as a curriculum developer (12%), an intermediary (5%) or a gatekeeper (3%).

With regard to Research Question 4, professional learning activities are offered primarily in the form of separate and short-term (one-day) events, including seminars, workshops and education courses (77%). Longer education activities (8%) and conferences (7%) account for a much smaller share. The same applies to the formal forms of peer learning (learning communities: 4%). The remaining share of professional learning activities for teacher educators includes staying abreast of current events (2%), research (1%) and reflection on one's own practice (1%).

Sub-study 2: Professional learning needs of teacher educators in Flanders

The survey was completed by 248 respondents (188 female [76%] and 60 male [24%]). The age of the teacher educators varied between 24 and 64 years ($M = 43$ years; $SD = 9.74$). A profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. When evaluating the results regarding the programmes in which teacher educators operate, it is important to note that the respondents were able to indicate multiple options. School-based teacher educators were under-represented, as compared to those based in institutions. As indicated by the results, teacher educators of all levels of education and experience, as well as from different settings were represented in the sample.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

According to the results concerning the respondents' previous education (multiple answers were possible, see Table 2), four-fifths of the teacher educators ($N = 9 + 13 + 46 + 130 = 198$; 80% $N = 248$) had completed a professional Bachelor degree in education or specific teacher

education programme. The remaining fifth of the teacher educators had no teaching qualifications.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

A summary of the teacher educator's past (Research Question 5) and future desired professional education (Research Question 6) is provided in Table 3. Institution-based teacher educators enrolled primarily in education programmes focusing on their role as teachers of teachers (35%). Moreover, most opted for first-order teaching courses, with the objective of strengthening and deepening their own content knowledge and skills. Little attention was paid to professional education for their roles as researchers (17%), curriculum developers (15%) and supervisors (15%), although the roles of intermediary (10%) and gatekeeper (9%) received even less attention. The professional learning of the school-based teacher educators responding to this survey focused primarily on the roles of teacher of teachers (30%) and coach (25%). Much less attention was paid to their learning as gatekeepers (14%), intermediaries (14%) and researchers (11%). These teacher educators devoted very little attention to their roles as curriculum developers (6%).

The results concerning the professional learning activities that the respondents desired in the next two years reveal several shifts. Institution-based teacher educators tended to pay more attention to their roles as curriculum developers (23%) and as gatekeepers (14%), while slightly decreasing their focus on their role as teachers of teachers (19%). Results for school-based teacher educators indicate an increase in their focus on professional learning as teachers of teachers (35%) and curriculum developers (13%), along with a decrease in their focus on the role of coach (18%).

[Insert Table 3 about here]

The professional learning activity choices of teacher educators were also addressed in Research Questions 5 and 6. The preferences and differences between the past and future choices of institution-based teacher educators are presented in Table 4. These teacher educators indicated a strong preference for seminars, workshops and conferences (90%), as well as for consultation with colleagues (90%). Other frequent options included reading (73%–74%), implementation (74%) and participation in learning communities (55%). The

future preferences of these teacher educators show very little difference with regard to these types of professional learning. The results further indicate an increase in the intention to participate in shorter (+ 30%) and longer (+ 12%) education programmes, educational innovation projects (+ 32%) and action research (+ 18%), as well as to write and publish scientific articles (+ 11%). Teacher educators indicated an increasing demand for participation in peer-to-peer coaching (+ 12%) and supervision (+ 11%). Other desirable forms of professional learning included teacher educator internships, international study programmes, dialogue with the industry and students, teacher design teams and working in knowledge centres.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

The teacher educators identified time (42%), policies (38%), supply (10%) and resources (9%) as obstacles with a major influence (in relative terms) on professional learning. The dimension of time was further specified in terms of time constraints, incompatibility and the organisation's own mission. At the policy level, most of the teacher educators reported the absence of any position statement or coordination of professional learning, in addition to rigidity in scheduling and the preparation of individual timetables. School-based teacher educators reported being inhibited by the lack of compensation for mentorship duties. The quality and variety in the professional education opportunities offered for teacher educators appeared to constitute a major barrier. In addition, the teacher educators emphasised the need for more multi-day professional learning activities. As described by one teacher educator, *'education courses are too short to gain any true mastery of the required skills, resulting in failure to implement'*. Another barrier involves the organisation of the opportunities offered. Respondents made specific reference to fragmentation and limited communication about the specific options for teacher educators. Some of the teacher educators reported experiencing the lack of funding and the cost of education courses as obstacles.

Sub-study 3: Recommended professional learning strategies throughout the teacher educator's career

Research Questions 8 and 9 were investigated according to the qualitative analysis of the outcomes of the focus groups. Appropriate professional learning strategies throughout the various stages of a teacher educator's career are presented as a continuum of professional learning (see Figure 1):

- Induction (formal education): During this phase, professional learning focuses on the teacher educator's identity orientation to the roles of a teacher educator. The emphasis is on the teacher educator's role as a facilitator and second-order teacher. In addition to a set programme, customisation is necessary, given the wide diversity of previous experience and education among teacher educators. Such in-service education is regarded as compensatory. The education programme should transcend the level of the teacher educator's own institution, and it should be conducted in partnership with several teacher education institutions. The teacher educator's own institution is expected to continue the professional learning process, aligning guidance and support. The appointment of a mentor (i.e. an experienced teacher educator) is desirable during this phase of professional learning.
- Beginner: This phase is characterised by professional learning within professional learning communities, which also include experienced teacher educators. Novice teacher educators participate in supervision sessions in order to reflect on their own practice.
- Professional: This phase is characterised by learning within professional learning communities, both within the teacher educator's own organization and in schools. Collaborative inquiry with regard to teaching practices is considered an effective and desirable form of professional learning.
- Expert: In this phase, teacher educators learn by performing practice-based or other educational research. There is a need for expert meetings in which to share knowledge at the national and international level. Peer-to-peer coaching is regarded as an appropriate method of facilitating professional learning.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

One condition for offering effective learning pathways for teacher educators (Research Question 10) is that professional learning must arise from an inquiry-oriented stance focused on growth. Within professional learning communities, teacher educators learn from having shared responsibility in the learning of future teachers and their own students. Expertise is either shared within the community or engaged from outside (when crucial expertise is missing). Learning communities of mixed teams (institution-based and school-based teacher educators) are desirable. Learning programmes should ideally follow a contextual and practical structure. Customisation is essential, given the differences in needs due to experience, education, skills and the ways in which teacher educators wish to shape their careers (in terms of breadth and depth). Professional development initiatives should be chosen purposefully, depending upon the professional development needs of the individual and upon

sustainability within the teacher education programme. The teacher educators who participated in the focus groups identified time and space for structural consultation as conditions for professional learning. They noted that they require time ‘to reflect’ on their own practice and to become familiar with each other’s organisations (i.e. institutions and schools). Learning in professional learning communities, through educational programmes and/or together with schools requires precise alignment.

Discussion and Conclusions

This article focuses on the professional learning of Flemish teacher educators. Given the societal responsibility that teacher educators bear in the learning process of students and future teachers, lifelong learning seems obvious and necessary. As indicated by the three studies presented here, Flemish teacher educators devote considerable attention to their professional learning, and they are able to meet their needs through the broad range of existing courses and programmes offered within the educational system. The results also indicate that there is still room for improvement with regard to adapting professional learning opportunities to the observed needs and career stages of teacher educators. In the following sections, we review the key findings and relate them to recommendations for supporting policy decisions concerning professional learning.

The individual information in the sample of teacher educators indicates that one in five of the teacher educators had no specific pedagogical qualifications. This is remarkable, given the important role of teacher educators as second-order teachers. From this perspective, it should be logical to expect that teacher educators would at least have been educated as teachers. Having a teaching degree guarantees at least the mastery of a minimum number of basic competences and achieved educational core goals from the teacher education curriculum. In Flanders, some schools are known to have hired individuals without teaching degrees, and this suggests that the same might apply to teacher educators. Although not everyone who is appointed as a teacher educator has a teaching assignment, it would seem inconsistent to emphasise professional learning without requiring teaching qualifications as a precondition for teachers and teacher educators with teaching assignments. Having a teaching degree should therefore be used systematically as a selection criterion in the appointment of teacher educators. If this is not possible, novice teacher educators without teaching qualifications should be given the opportunity to obtain their teaching certificates during the induction phase.

Many professional opportunities are offered in various forms in Flanders, provided by various suppliers. The diversity of activities and suppliers is certainly an advantage that meets the multitude of professional learning needs of teacher educators. Nevertheless, the supply of education that specifically targeted teacher educators is more limited than the demand. The supply offered by the networks of expertise could be made more accessible by optimising coordination and providing a more transparent overview. Although the professional learning opportunities provided by the professional association through self-regulation is commendable, these opportunities remain limited and fragile. If the professional association aspires to play an important role in the professional learning of teacher educators, it must strengthen its base significantly. In addition, it should develop, encourage and coordinate a suitable range of professional learning opportunities based on a clear vision of the job content of teacher educators (e.g. the various roles), as well as on the needs of the profession and other stakeholders.

Teacher educators strive to achieve recognition as professionals. It is therefore important for them to have sufficient autonomy to shape their own processes of professional learning. Teacher educators should be free to make targeted individual choices in the pursuit of their own professional learning. It is also important to align the growth of individual teacher educators with that of the team. This should be done without curtailing individual commitments, as teacher educators share a collective responsibility for the teacher education curriculum. The development profile provides a common language and framework to this end. Teams of teacher educators should recognise their professional needs autonomously and act accordingly. The team should explore the extent to which team members would benefit from further efforts to broaden the scope of professional learning, or whether specialisation in one or more roles would be more appropriate.

Short (e.g. one-day) forms of education have proven successful. The demand for multi-day or long-term professional learning programmes exceeds the supply. At the same time, even shorter professional learning activities are subject to perceived budgetary and organisational barriers. More importantly, the time constraints and workload of teacher educators make it difficult for many to fulfil their professional needs. If the need for professional learning amongst teacher educators is serious, the obstacles must be addressed at their roots, and professional learning should be stipulated in the job description. This is the only way to ensure that long-term education programmes will have a realistic chance of success.

The education needs of teacher educators differ according to career stage, and the appropriate education methods differ according to the position of the teacher educator within the professional continuum. In this study, we cannot make reliable conclusions whether professional learning needs of school-based teacher educators differ from institution-based teacher educators, because of the limited response of the school-based teacher educators. A future study that focuses on professional learning needs of school-based teacher educators would be of additional value.

Room for professional learning is necessary for teacher educators in all career stages, regardless of whether they are based in teacher education institutions or in schools. An important place should continue to be reserved for informal learning. Education is most needed in the induction phase. Expert teacher educators recommend offering broad education in the earliest career stages, with attention to all roles that teacher educators are expected to fulfil. This may help early career teacher educators transform into knowledgeable skilled teacher educators (Fehring & Rodrigues, 2014). At the same time, sufficient customisation is necessary, in order to meet the needs of the teacher educators and respond to their autonomous motivation.

Various forms of learning networks emerge throughout the career development continuum. Collaboration in professional learning communities based on shared responsibility for the learning processes of students and future teachers has proven to be very effective. Various forms of supervision and peer-to-peer coaching are likely to be of great significance, given their flexibility and suitability to customisation. It is important to provide support for learning teams of teacher educators, whether within institutions, across institutions or in international contexts, in addition to emphasising the organisation of learning teams to include both teacher educators and current and future school teachers.

This study was commissioned by VELOV, and it received financial support from the Flemish Government (Department of Education and Training). The three sub-studies were conducted over a period of nine months. It was obviously not possible to address all aspects of the professional learning of teacher educators (in Flanders or elsewhere). In the course of this study, we faced a number of difficult methodological decisions. In Sub-study 1, we assigned priority to compiling an inventory of the existing professional learning activities of entire teams. To this end, we included three teams in the design. The accuracy of the results would probably have been increased had we included all types of teacher educators (including both

academic teacher educators and school-based teacher educators). In Sub-study 2, we opted for an efficient chain sample, which ultimately resulted in the appropriate representation of teacher educators from the three types of institutions (CVOs, colleges, universities). School-based teacher educators, however, were under-represented. Although we have included the results from the group of school-based teacher educators in the analysis wherever possible, it is clear that this group deserves its own follow-up research. For Sub-study 3, the sample was composed of casual participants at the respective meetings. The results indicate that the expertise needed in order to draw conclusions was indeed present within these groups.

For suppliers of professional learning activities, our results reveal interesting tendencies. For example, we observed a broadening of professional learning needs across different roles for both institution-based and school-based teacher educators. The professional learning preferences of teacher educators include supervision and peer-to-peer coaching as a strategy, learning communities as a mode of organisation and long-term education programmes in terms of time. These findings provide a solid foundation for a more thorough market study of successful professional learning activities for teacher educators. For example, the content and mode of the professional learning needs could be mapped more accurately according to type of teacher educator or career stage. In our study, we focused primarily on providing an overview of the professional learning of Flemish teacher educators that would be useful for those making decisions in this respect: governments, departments, boards and the professional association.

Recent developments, particularly the decision of the Flemish government to abandon the expertise networks, the most powerful means of professional development of Flemish teacher educators have disappeared. This was undoubtedly a blow for the employees of the networks themselves, as well as for virtually the entire field of teacher educators who made use of their services. From a more positive perspective, the void that has been created offers opportunities for various parties, including VELOV, to develop a less fragmented catalogue of professional learning activities for the future. The success of such efforts will depend upon whether the professional association for teacher educators is allowed to opportunity to fulfil this role.

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