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Being a teacher educator in Ireland

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Teacher educators' professional learning

- European agenda for improving the quality of teacher education (EC 2010, 2013, 2015)
- Teacher educators' professional learning is under-researched
- Few systematic routes for teacher educators' ongoing learning
- Two forms of professional learning; in-service programmes and continuous experiential learning (Lipowski et al., 2011)
- Positioned within a complex amalgam of the biography, identity work, skills, values and dispositions embedded within different learning communities (Feiman-Nemser, 2001)



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Purpose

To present the survey data from Irish teacher educators who are working in a radically changing policy environment





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These Irish teacher educators seem to be a highly selective sample, given that 83% of them have PhDs



Demographics

- Demographics of teacher educators in Ireland are not well documented (estimate 600 part- and 400 full-time).
- Multiple professional pathways into the work of TE has remained similar to a historic pattern, i.e., (i) early starters, typically with strong research backgrounds and possibly some experience teaching in schools, and (ii) mid-career entry with professional practice in schools.



Life as a teacher educator

- While TE has become a policy priority in the last decade (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Department of Education and Skills; Teaching Council), the professional preparation of those working in TE has not been a policy focus.
- On-going government-initiated re-structuring and system rationalization, the goal of which is to reduce the number of TE providers from 19 to six, and to concentrate TE in these six sites as ‘centers of excellence’ (Hyland, 2011; Sahlberg et al., 2012).



Teacher education and research

- More pressure on TE academics as they work in higher educational institutions (Sahlberg Report, 2012) to acquire a PhD and publish in peer-reviewed research outlets.
- Anecdotal evidence would suggest significant differences between institutions in the standing and profile of research on TE.
- We do not know the proportion of staff involved, the duration of involvement, the types and foci of studies nor the extent to which such research is seen as central or not to teacher educators' professional institutional profiles.



Professional learning opportunities

- A number of tensions in relation to the professional preparation of teacher educators in Ireland, tensions that are especially acute in a context of increased rankings pressures on universities.
- Implications of differing entry points and professional preparation pathways for the work of TE, especially when, as recommended by the Sahlberg Report (2012), TE is increasingly seen as optimal in a university setting.
- A relative lack of focus on professional learning for teacher educators (Byrne, 2002; Kellaghan, 2002).



Methodology

- Questionnaire distributed through TE institutions and TE networks in Ireland;
- Demographics
- Life as a teacher educator
- Teacher education and research
- Professional learning opportunities

Sample

- 54 teacher educators (2/3 female)
- Spread of ages
- 51 work full-time as a teacher educator
- 9 Masters & 45PhD
- 70% / 26% working in a university / college context



Demographics

Results

- 83% PhDs
- Highly research active
- Supervise Masters and doctoral degrees

Comments

- Highly selective sample to those reported by Lunenberg et al., (2014)
- Until recently, more dominant pathway was those with professional experience as teachers and a Masters



Life as a teacher educator

Results

- View work as a teacher educator and *academic scholar* more than mentor or *researcher*
- Lack of emphasis on role of researcher
- 96% note they are research active

Comments

- Active researchers (Sahlberg et al., 2012) and research informed (Dutch Association of Teacher Educators)
- Not informed about TE research (Lunenberg et al., 2014)
- Lack of alignment between research and TE responsibilities



Teacher education and research

Results

- Value research as essential and complete as part of their current role in higher education
- Less engaged with or familiar with research on preparation of future teachers / solving problems in their practice

Comment

- often teacher educators are “insufficiently informed about the [teacher education] literature and...not focused on strengthening their theoretical knowledge base” (Lunenberget al.’s, 2014, p. 74)



Professional learning opportunities

Survey prompt	Strong	Weak
PL activities most valued	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Personal reading▪ Visits to other schools / TE institutions▪ Informal learning conversations▪ Conference presentations▪ Secondment / sabbatical	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Award-bearing courses▪ Peer coaching
Influence in PL engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Providers▪ Staff to cover work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Salary rise
Most popular request for PL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Current developments in TE▪ Assessment▪ Integrating technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Academic administration



Professional learning opportunities

Two most important professional learning needs

Teacher education practices (13)

Use of technology / online learning / online teaching platforms (12)

Research (11)

Researching own practice (7)

General professional development (7)

Working with / support from others (7)

Time to engage, write and reflect (6)

Research proposal / funding writing (6)



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Professional learning opportunities

Professional learning opportunities that would best meet needs

Training - writing retreats / workshops / seminars / discussions (35)

Institutional support (12)

Collaboration with colleagues / one-to-one coaching / peer coaching (11)

Visits to other contexts / external collaborations (7)

Time (4)



In conclusion ...

- An early exploration of learning how best to support teacher educators
- Follow-up interviews
- InFo-TED Erasmus+ funding award
- Increasing cohort of professional school-based teacher educators