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### **Teacher Educators' Professional Development: Practitioner Research, A Promising Approach?**

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The important role of high qualified teacher education to prepare the next generation of teachers has become a focus of increased international interest (Bates, Swennen & Jones, 2011; Lunenberg e.a. 2013; Murray e.a., 2008;). The European Commission (2012), for instance, clearly states that *"If teachers are the most important in-school factor influencing the quality of students' learning, the competences of those who educate and support teachers must be of the highest order."* (p.54) In this respect, however, it's surprisingly to determine that, worldwide those responsible for the education of future teachers - teacher educators - often have not been formally prepared for their vital role.

From the beginning of the 21st century the need for professional development of teacher educators is both nationally and internationally growing and recognised in policy literature (European Commission, 2013) as well as research literature (Bates, Swennen & Jones, 2011; Ben-Peretz e.a., 2013). In this respect, some countries (e.g. The Netherlands, England, and Israel) have developed standards or frameworks for teacher educators. These standards or frameworks represent an ideal image of the competencies teacher educators need to possess in order to function effectively (Murray e.a., 2008; Smith 2003). A common aspect in all standards or frameworks formulated is the focus on the development of *"teacher educators as teachers of teachers"* and *"teacher educators as researchers"* (Berry, 2007). Murray (2008) clearly illustrates this twofold focus by stressing that *"good teacher educators will be expert teachers of teachers, as well as scholars involved in production of different forms of new knowledge in their field."* (p.42).

The focus on the development of *"teacher educators as teachers of teachers"* and *"teacher educators as researchers"* implies that teacher educators' professional development has to focus on both research and practice at the same time (Rust, 2009). Consequently, Cochran-Smith (2003) conceptualises teacher educators' professional development as an *"inquiry as stance"* (p.7) which refers to *"a process of continual and systematic inquiry wherein teacher educators question their own and others assumptions and construct local as well as public knowledge appropriate to the changing contexts in which they work."* (p.24). Munn (2008) describes this *"inquiry as stance"* as the development of *"a researchery disposition"* (p.422). In this context, practitioner research is often promoted as a powerful strategy to support this *"inquiry as stance"* or *"researchery disposition"*. Practitioner research is broadly defined as *"the intentional and systematic inquiry into one's own practice"* (Dinkelman, 2003, p.8). Practitioner research carried out by teacher educators is about enhancing one's own practice, engaging in continuing professional development, and contributing to the knowledge base of teacher education.

Based on the results of a pre-study, and the theoretical, empirical and methodological research challenges the research field on teacher education is facing, this research project aims to advance insight into practitioner research as a strategy to support teacher educators' professional development. This main objective is translated into four research questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4):

- *What theoretical framework can we develop to assess teacher educators' researchery disposition based on available literature and empirical research in the field? (RQ1)*
- *Which reliable and valid instrument can be developed to measure the researchery disposition of teacher educators? (RQ2)*
- *What conditions support the development of teacher educators' researchery disposition? (RQ3)*
- *What are the effects of a teacher educator professionalisation course on the development of teacher educators' researchery disposition? (RQ4)*

Empirically answering these research questions will enhance theory building as well as stimulate evidence-based practices in teacher education.

#### *Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used*

In order to answer the research questions mentioned above, four studies will be set up. The numbering of the studies corresponds to the research questions of the project.

#### 1. Literature review

##### Study 1

The aim of the first study is to develop a theoretical framework for assessing teacher educators' researchery disposition. The development of this theoretical framework (RQ1) will be based on a review of the available research and policy-oriented literature concerning teacher educators' researchery disposition.

#### 2. Quantitative studies

The second and the third study will be based on a teacher educator survey administered to a representative sample of university-based teacher educators (lecturers) active in Flemish universities, centres for adult education and colleges of higher education (universities of applied sciences) (n > 400).

##### Study 2

Concerning the second study, the aim is to develop and validate a measurement instrument to empirically assess and describe

teacher educators' researcherly disposition based on a comprehensive review of the literature (see Study 1). In other words, it is endeavoured to develop an item pool on teacher educators' researcherly disposition and explore its factor structure.

#### Study 3

The aim of the third study (RQ3) is to investigate conditions that influence teacher educators' researcherly disposition. In this respect, the developed measurement scale of the second study "teacher educators' researcherly disposition" will serve as the dependent variable in the third study. Personal factors, task factors and the work environment are distinguished as independent variables.

#### 3. Intervention study

#### Study 4

The main objective of this study is to assess the effects of a teacher educator professionalisation course developed to support the development of teacher educators' researcherly disposition. A quasi-experimental design - more specific a matched control group design - will be set up to answer the fourth research question (RQ4). One experimental group (N=24) and one comparison group (N=24) will be distinguished. In the experimental condition, the development of teacher educators' researcherly disposition is supported during a one year professionalisation course concerning practitioner research. Pre-test and post-test data (teacher educator survey and semi-structured interviews) will be gathered to assess to which degree teacher educators' disposition can be developed over time.

#### *Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings*

This research project envisages theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions to the research field on teacher educators.

First, this research project pursues a theoretical contribution by clarifying the concepts 'practitioner research' and 'researcherly disposition' in the context of teacher educators' professional development. Moreover, the empirical value of this research project is worth mentioning as this research project aims to operationalise the 'researcherly disposition' and aims to map the effects of a teacher educator professionalisation course. To conclude, methodological contributions are envisaged by conducting quantitative and quasi-experimental research – which differs from the research tradition in teacher education.

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#### *Intent of Publication*

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