

# Teacher education as a mirror of the profession

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## Introduction

The Portuguese National Education Council has organized a set of seminars and conferences on structural topics under the legal framework defined by the Portuguese Education Act (The Law that rules the education system). The aim of the seminars and conferences is to provide input for a proposal to revise the Education Act.

The eighth seminar 'Formação de professores: dilemas e desafios' (Teacher education: Dilemmas and challenges) was held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October at the Polytechnic Institute of Santarém, and focused on the main dimensions, dilemmas, tensions and challenges faced by those involved in initial and in-service teacher education and training in Portugal and elsewhere.

This keynote<sup>1</sup> aims to provide a perspective in which initial teacher education and continuous professional development of teachers are connected. Starting point is the understanding of the teaching profession as an extended profession that is characterized by a continuum of teacher learning. The keynote elaborates on four key messages:

- We need to understand the teaching profession as a collaborative profession in which teaching is constantly developed, inspired by an ongoing dialogue between practice and research.
- It is characterized by a continuum of lifelong professional development, which is reflected in support structures, competence levels, career steps, school cultures and daily work.
- To realize this image of the profession, cultures in initial teacher education and schools need to be aligned and the 'curriculum' of teacher education needs to be understood as a curriculum that continues after finishing initial teacher education.
- Therefore, a strong collaboration between schools and ITE institutions is essential.

## The extended professionalism of teachers

Societies face multiple challenges when it comes to education. These challenges include the need to create equal opportunities for pupils/students with diverse backgrounds, to accommodate a growing

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<sup>1</sup> This contribution is for a large part based on the insights that have been developed within the European Commission's Working Group School, where representatives from national ministries were involved in a peer learning process on improving (initial) teacher education. These insights have been published in 'Shaping Career-long perspectives on teaching. A guide on policies to improve initial teacher education' (ET2020 Working Group School, 2015).

number of immigrants and refugees, to fight radicalism and intolerance, to engage parents, to increase learning outcomes, to reduce early school leaving, to give adequate support for students with special needs, etc. Given all these challenges, it feels that kids in Europe are ‘waiting for Superman’ (which is the title of a documentary on the American educational system). When we take a close look at all these challenges, it is not ministries, policy makers or school principals who are called upon, but it is a call to teachers to adapt their practices and meet all those challenges within their classrooms.

Then we discuss teacher education, the starting point should be the understanding that within educational systems, the real superman and superwomen are the teachers that daily support the learning of pupils and students. They can only face that challenge when we understand the profession as a collaborative profession where teachers collectively and constantly work to improve their educational practices.

This implies that we need to understand the teaching profession as a profession that is characterized by an extended professionalism of teachers, where teachers are not only responsible for delivering the curriculum, but also for designing and adapting the curriculum, where teaching is understood as a collaborative activity which requires a professional approach combining both technical elements and values, and which is research informed (cf. Hoyle 1974).

<b>Narrow professionalism</b>	<b>Extended professionalism</b>
<b>Delivering the curriculum</b>	<b>Delivering and developing the curriculum</b>
<b>Individual</b>	<b>Collaborative</b>
<b>Technical</b>	<b>Professional</b>
<b>Practice focused</b>	<b>Research informed</b>

Figure 1: Narrow professionalism versus extended professionalism (cf Hoyle 1974).

### **An abrupt and lonely profession**

That raises the question to what extent we support teachers to develop that extended professionalism and to be able to meet the challenges mentioned above. However, when we take a close look at the way the teaching profession within European member states is structured, we have to conclude that we actually are doing a poor job. In many professions, novice practitioners are slowly introduced in the profession with a gradual increase of responsibilities. In the first year they join an experienced professional and only after a number of years they’ll get full responsibilities for projects or for daily practice. Such a slow introduction into professional life and responsibilities does not exist for teachers. Novice teachers are expected to take full responsibility for their classes the day they finish initial teacher education and start working in schools. From day 1 they have the same responsibilities in their classes as experienced teachers who have been teaching for 20 or 30 years.

This creates a high level of stress for many beginning teachers. Added to that abrupt change from student to teachers is the fact that in most schools in Europe teachers work on their own. Most schools are organized around individual teachers who are responsible for their classes, their pupils and their subject. This isolated structure turns teaching into a lonely profession. During their daily work, teachers hardly have opportunities to consult colleagues, and to share responsibilities.

This situation conveys a number of implicit messages to teachers and to society as a whole:

- After graduation you are ready for the profession
- and are able to take all responsibilities of an experienced teacher
- on your own.
- So, what is there to learn once you graduated?

The choice which has been made in many European countries (including Portugal) to raise the qualification for initial teacher education to the Master's level, actually strengthens this message: 'Master level teachers are highly educated, so there is little need for further professional development.'

These messages have a number of consequences:

- Students who feel insecure with their full responsibility and isolation, start looking at how other teachers are doing things in school. They start copying existing practices in schools instead of introducing new methodologies and ideas that they developed during teacher education.
- Teacher quality is understood as a static concept. As a consequence educational systems express concerns about teacher quality, leading to a strong focus on 'selecting the best'.
- Teacher education is blamed if students fail. This might lead to two different responses from universities: either they adapt their curricula, trying to prepare students more effectively for surviving the first years of teaching, leading to a more instrumental curriculum; or they defend their academic position, strengthen their position in the 'ivory tower' while losing connection with the reality within schools.
- National policies and school policies often lack a clear perspective of teacher learning after initial teacher education ('developing the best').

### **Five connected perspectives on the continuum of teacher learning**

To support teachers in the complex challenges they face, it is essential that we redefine our understanding of teacher education and see it as a continuum of lifelong professional development, starting within initial teacher education, extending into the first years of teaching (the induction phase) and continuing during the professional career. Understanding teacher education as a continuum, implies that we need not only to think about the curriculum of initial teacher education, but also the 'curriculum' of the induction phase and the 'curriculum' for continuous professional

development<sup>2</sup>: what need and can be learnt in these phases and what is the best and most effective methodology that can be used.

When we understand the teaching profession and the professional development of teachers as a continuum, it is important to align several perspectives (adapted from ET2020 Working Group School, 2015, p 17-18).

### 1. **The pedagogical perspective: teacher concerns and learning needs**

The pedagogical perspective is at the core of the continuum. It concerns the teacher and his/her learning needs, which can be characterised by different phases.

In the initial phase the focus is on *becoming a teacher*. Often, this phase is connected with the period of initial teacher training.

In the induction phase the focus is on *being a teacher*. This phase covers the first years of the profession, during which teachers are working in schools and develop their professional identity and confidence as a teacher. The induction phase is an intense time of 'survival', adaptation and discovery, which influences whether teachers stay on in the profession and influences what kind of teacher they become. It entails changes in role, identity, and attitudes to knowledge from formal theory to practice challenges. It is argued that new teachers may find themselves in a paradoxical, vulnerable situation where they must demonstrate skills that are not fully developed, and can only learn by beginning to do what they do not yet fully understand (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

During the phase of continuous professional development there is an emphasis on *staying and growing as a teacher*. In this phase, teachers usually undergo a phase of experimentation and consolidation, followed by a phase of mastery.

### 2. **The instrumental perspective: support structures**

The support structure consists of structures, policies and support mechanisms that are in place to assist teachers in their reflective practice and development.

This support structure begins in ITE during which student teachers are supported in becoming a teacher.

In the induction phase the support structure involves mentoring programmes and other activities. The focus of mentoring programmes is crucial in stimulating the development of teacher identity. Well trained mentors can support new teachers to move beyond an identity which is connected to teaching as a routine profession and to develop an innovative identity in which teaching is considered as an inquiring and innovative profession.

In the third phase, support structures should focus on career-long Continuing Professional Development. This period can cover a wide range of activities, including: learning from communities of practice, lesson study, action research, self-study and formal INSET courses leading to qualifications. Support structures during this phase enable coherence between these different activities and relevance to the individual needs of teachers.

In all three phases, sources for learning come from experience (teaching and teaching practice), from peers and other key stakeholders and providers (in communities of practice

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<sup>2</sup> In this context, the term 'curriculum' should not be understood as a fixed set of modules in a fixed order and with a fixed content, but as an explicit and contextual view on how aims and methodology for teacher learning in a specific phase, a specific context and a specific individual are connected.

and classroom observation) and from theory. Learning from theory is often limited in the teaching period after ITE. Theoretical ideas and research findings can help to build reflective teaching and this practice needs supporting. Career-long instruments, such as teacher portfolios can help to strengthen the continuum of teaching.

### 3. **The career perspective: job market and career structures**

A career or job perspective refers to how the career structure affects the way teachers develop. Understanding the teaching profession as a continuum implies that the career structure should support continuous growth in several areas: growth in competence and qualities, in responsibilities, in tasks and functions, and in salary levels. The career perspective initially refers to the qualification needed to be a teacher, for example Bachelor's or Master's degrees.

In some countries the second step is a probation period when a teacher works on a temporary basis in a school but is not yet granted the full teaching license. That is acquired only after further assessment.

The third step involves teacher appraisal and feedback; identification of personal development goals; and moving to new roles and responsibilities.

### 4. **The professional perspective: competence levels**

Formal recognition of competence levels begins with the qualifications that are expected from newly qualified teachers. Newly qualified teachers then continue to develop their individual competences while working as a teacher. New descriptions of further competences levels can be explicitly defined as landmarks for further development, connected with periodic teacher appraisal. These levels could be used as a framework to demonstrate learning and development in teachers' portfolios and connect to a probation period, teacher registration, or to recognition as an excellent or chartered teacher or as a teacher leader. Monitoring learning outcomes as part of teachers' professional development gives direction to teachers' career paths and specialisation. Other expectations which might be externally imposed on teachers can lead to alienation of teachers from their own professional development. A coherent set of competences at different levels can strengthen the coherence of the profession. It is good practice to share language and agree frameworks for teacher development between the key institutions including training providers, educational organisations, government, local authorities, teacher associations, unions and employers.

### 5. **The cultural perspective: local school culture**

Local school cultures support the continuing development of teachers. During initial teacher education, the local culture is influenced by teacher education providers and training schools and by the extent in which these organisations see themselves as partners in the education of new teachers and whether they invest in the training of mentors for student teachers. After initial teacher education the local school culture defines how teacher learning is valued. This local culture is influenced by the extent to which learning and working as a teacher are integrated and stimulated through professional learning communities, team teaching and action research projects.

To create a profession that is focused on continuous professional development, it is important that these five perspectives are aligned and based on a shared understanding of the profession and of teacher learning and that a similar language and similar instruments are used in the different phases of the continuum and by different stakeholders.

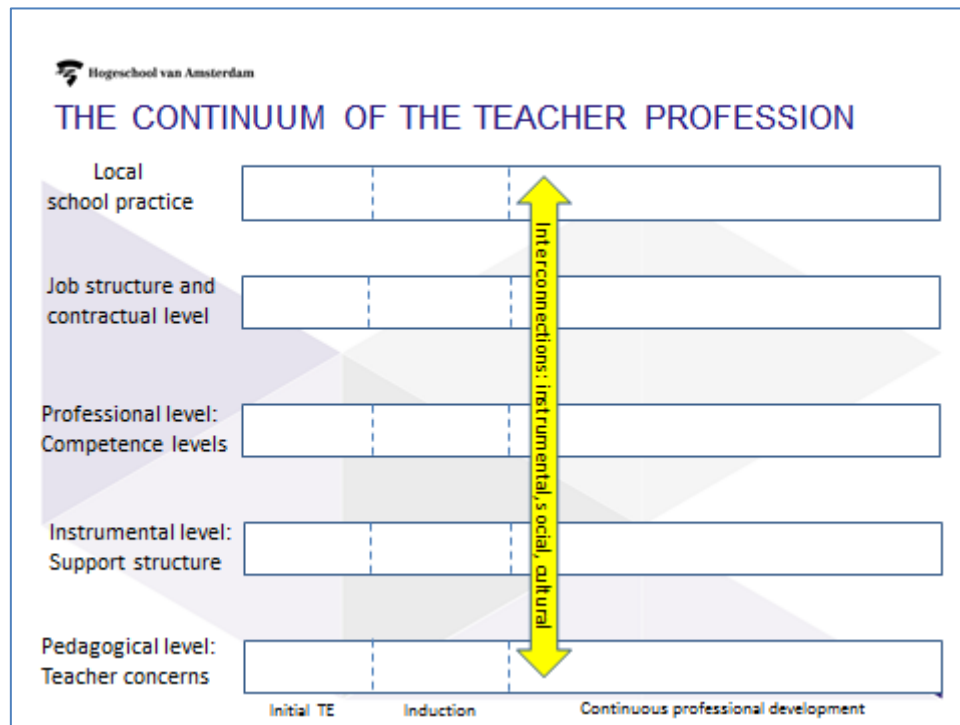


Figure 2: Five perspectives on the continuum of the teaching profession (based on ET202 Working Group Schools, 2015, p 19)

### Three sources for teacher learning

Research on professional development of teachers (e.g. Van Veen, Zwart, Meirink & Verloop, 2010) has shown that effective forms of teacher learning are characterized by a close connection to daily practice in schools, are organized as a collaborative activity and include a balance and constant dialogue between theory and practice. This indicates that teacher learning can be inspired by three different sources: theory and research, peers and personal experience. This understanding can be used to create a frame of reference to analyse to what extent these three sources are used within the teacher education curriculum: within universities that role of theory and research is often emphasized, but it is also important to take practice and peers into account as important sources for teacher learning.

These three sources are also important as sources for professional development of teachers during their career. However, the availability of these sources cannot be taken for granted in schools. In many school, the access of teachers to theory and research is limited as teachers have no access to research publications, and as there are little impulses to use new insights from research in adapting existing practices. Also the opportunity to learn from peers is limited as teachers mostly work on their own. They have little access to the practice of colleagues as teachers teach in their own

classrooms and peer observation is only practiced in a few schools. Teacher meetings often deal with organisational issues and less with educational and pedagogical dialogues.

Finally, the possibility to learn from experience is limited. Although teachers gain lots of experience during their teaching career, in many cases these experiences lead to routine and not necessarily to improvement. This is illustrated in figure 3 below and supported by work of Van de Grift and Van der Wal (2010) who looked at the pedagogical-didactical expertise of teachers and observed a levelling effect after five years of teaching.

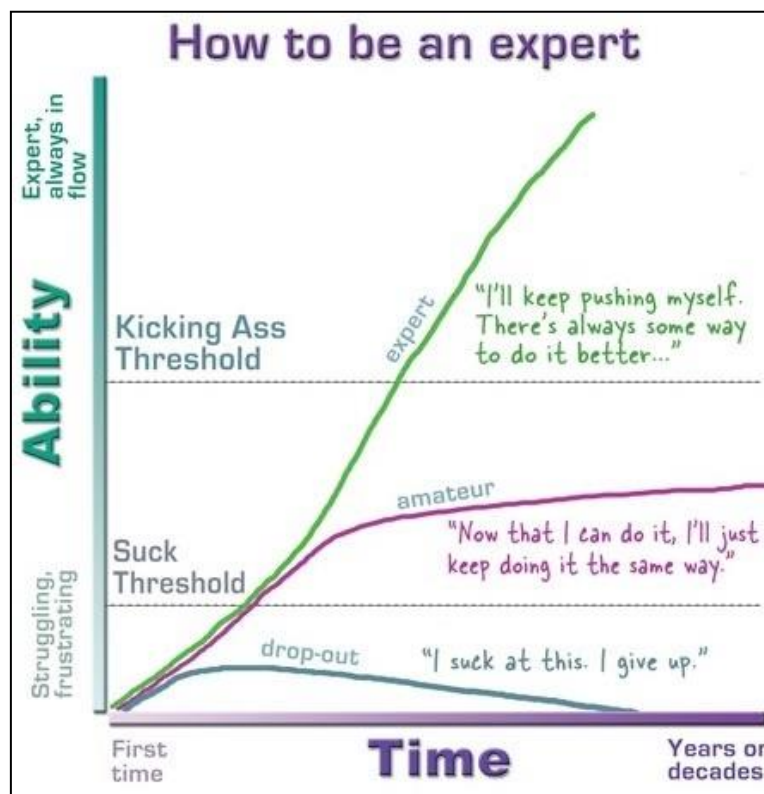


Figure 3: Development of ability over time (from Sierra, 2006)

Experience can only be an effective source for teacher learning when it is organized as deliberative practice (Ericsson, 2006): when practice and active reflection on practice are organized *consistently and deliberately* in such a way that the aim is to improve performance.

As the availability and use of the three sources for learning (theory & research, peers and experience) cannot be taken for granted, local and national policies that intend to stimulate a continuum of teacher learning need to develop a understanding of how the 'curriculum' for teacher learning extends beyond initial teacher training and how the three learning sources can be strengthened within the context of schools.

### The integration of teaching and learning

In many educational systems in Europe, the need for professional development of teachers during their career is recognized as an important element to improve teaching. In support programs for

school leaders, the need for active human resource policies is emphasized. In the Netherlands, school boards are stimulated to develop an explicit vision and policy regarding teacher development, identify a part of the school budget for CPD activities for teachers and arrange CPD activities in terms of staff conferences. In other countries there is a strong focus on the availability of a wide variety of INSET courses.

Although these initiatives create important opportunities for teacher learning, they have one underlying fundamental problem: they separate teacher learning from the daily work of teachers. With a special policy, a special budget, special activities, separate staff conferences and separate INSET courses the implicit message is that teachers learn when they are not working. Teacher learning is disconnected from the daily work, implying that teachers do not learn when they work with pupils/students in their classes.

The challenge for schools is to rethink educational practices in schools and to arrange them in such a way that they become important sources for learning, that they invite teachers to engage in professional dialogues on their daily practices. There are several examples of activities that stimulate an integration of teaching and teacher learning, e.g. peer observation, lesson study, team teaching, etc. In such practices, the daily work of teachers is rearranged in such a way that a professional dialogue and teacher learning are stimulated.

### **The role of research in schools**

In recent debates on teacher education, the role of research based teacher education and of research within the curriculum of teacher education is strongly emphasized. The underlying message is that it is important that the daily work of teachers is informed about 'what works?'. Some even call for a profession that is 'evidence-based', like the medical professions where medical practices and protocols are worldwide adapted based on new insights from research.

Research in the curriculum and in the practice of teachers that aims to identify 'what works' is not an aim in itself, but a means for two other aims.

- First of all the aim is to develop an inquiring mindset (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) where teachers ask questions about practice, evaluate their practice systematically, collect data, etc.
- The second aim is to gain input to change and improve practice.

The second aim implies that research needs to be understood as an activity that intends to intervene with existing practices. However, in many cases research is not very effective in initiating change (Broekkamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007). In such cases, research activities are disconnected from the reality of practice, have little connection with the change agenda in schools and do not engage teachers as active participants.

When student teachers are engaged in research projects (e.g. as part of their research thesis), research should not be an aim in itself, but it should mirror the possible role of research within schools, as an inspiration and catalyst for improving practice. In a recent project in the Netherlands, both students and schools indicated that the thesis research project had little impact on school



practice and therefore was hardly meaningful for students and schools. Students indicated that they felt torn between the expectations from the university (emphasizing the need to meet academic research criteria) and the expectations from the school (emphasizing the practical impact on practice within the school). To bridge this gap, the thesis research project was redefined as a boundary activity that aimed to be a starting point for a professional dialogue between the student teachers, the supervisor from the university and the supervisor from the school. Through this dialogue, shared ownership, mutual understanding and meaningfulness for all actors was strengthened. As a result the thesis research projects could both contribute to proving the research capacities of the student and to changes within school practice.

Research and theory is an important source for teacher learning and for daily practice. However, it is not the only source for the daily practice in schools. Teaching is a profession in which morals and values play an important role. These morals and values that underlie the *purpose* of education are not the result of educational research, but are the result of professional and ethical dialogues between teachers and with the outside world. Next to the question 'what works?', teacher will need to answer the question 'what is needed?' (Biesta, 2007). This asks for the ability of teachers to engage in moral dialogues on the purpose of education and the ability to use a moral language. The ability to use such a language in professional dialogues on ethical dilemmas in schools and to relate in this dialogue to concrete situations in classes, can help (student) teachers to develop 'practical wisdom' in which practical experience, research and values are combined (Biesta, 2010).

### **Close collaboration between school and universities as a condition**

To create a continuum of teacher learning that is inspired by experience, research and values it is essential to recognize that teacher learning takes place within and can be inspired by two learning environments: the university and the school. Teacher learning will be strengthened when these two learning environments are aligned through a shared vision on the teaching profession and on teacher learning.

The development of such a shared vision requires strong and sustainable university-school partnerships, that do not only focus on initial teacher education, but that extends throughout the whole of the professional continuum. Within such school-university partnerships, university teachers and mentors/principals in schools work as equal partners, each with his/her own expertise, but with a shared aim: to improve learning opportunities for children by focusing on the learning of both student teachers, newly qualified teachers and experienced teachers.

### **Summarizing**

To summarize the above, I emphasized four key messages:

- We need to understand the teaching profession as a collaborative profession in which teaching is constantly developed, inspired by an ongoing dialogue between practice and research.

- It is characterized by a continuum of lifelong professional development, which is reflected in support structures, competence levels, career steps, school cultures and daily work.
- To realize this image of the profession, cultures in initial teacher education and schools need to be aligned and the 'curriculum' of teacher education needs to be understood as a curriculum that continues after finishing initial teacher education.
- Therefore, a strong collaboration between schools and initial teacher education institutions is essential.

These key messages can be used to reflect on the existing practice in initial teacher education and in the profession, on the way in which teacher learning is stimulated in both contexts, and on the way in which these contexts are aligned. This reflection can be supported by questions regarding the content of initial teacher education or regarding learning environments in schools and initial teacher education, such as:

The content of initial teacher education:

- What can reasonably be expected to be covered within the curriculum of initial teacher education and what needs to be developed after that (and be part of the 'curriculum' after initial teacher education)?
- How does initial teacher education create a foundation of a professional attitude of life long collaborative learning?
- How does initial teacher education prepare student teachers for engaging in dialogues on the essence of education in their school (based on values, research and experience)?
- How do content elements in initial teacher education (e.g. research assignments) relate to the reality of schools?

The learning environment:

- To what extent are the learning environments (and professional structures) in universities and schools aligned?

Answering these questions in a collaborative dialogue between teacher education institutes, schools, teacher unions and policy makers can be an effective way to develop a shared understanding that a focus on professional development of teachers is the best guarantee for the best possible education!

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He has been involved in many innovation projects in teacher education in the Netherlands and has published various publications in Dutch and English on teacher education, teacher development, and teacher leadership. In his work and projects he co-operates with student teachers, teachers, teacher educators, school leaders, researchers and policy makers. Through his research he aims to contribute to improvements in teacher education, in schools and in policies.