



(Re)Conceptualizing teacher educator professionalism

Reporting

Project Information

ReconTEP

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[Project website](#)

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Periodic Reporting for period 1 - ReconTEP ((Re)Conceptualizing teacher educator professionalism)

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Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project

Teachers matter. There is a robust body of research on the impact of teachers' identities, knowledge and beliefs on the quality of what happens in schools. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the same aspects matter in teacher education. Yet, teacher educators have, until recently, largely been ignored by researchers and policymakers alike, who have focused on structures of teacher education

and the outcomes from student teachers' participation in different training routes instead. ReConTEP addressed this knowledge gap and focused directly on the professionalism of teacher educators, whom we broadly defined as professionals involved in the initial preparation of student teachers. The objective of this research was to understand the content of teacher educators' professionalism by looking at how it actually operates in practice. We were interested in investigating what teacher educators actually do and why, and how this influences student teachers' (opportunities for) learning, as opposed to normative definitions of what teacher educators should do (e.g. in terms of lists of required competences or standards). ReConTEP resulted in a systematic and empirically validated conceptualization of teacher educators' professionalism, which is new to this emerging field of research and offers a strong basis for future research. Results also have direct knowledge utilization purposes for teacher educators themselves by opening up the dynamics of practice that usually remain hidden from view.

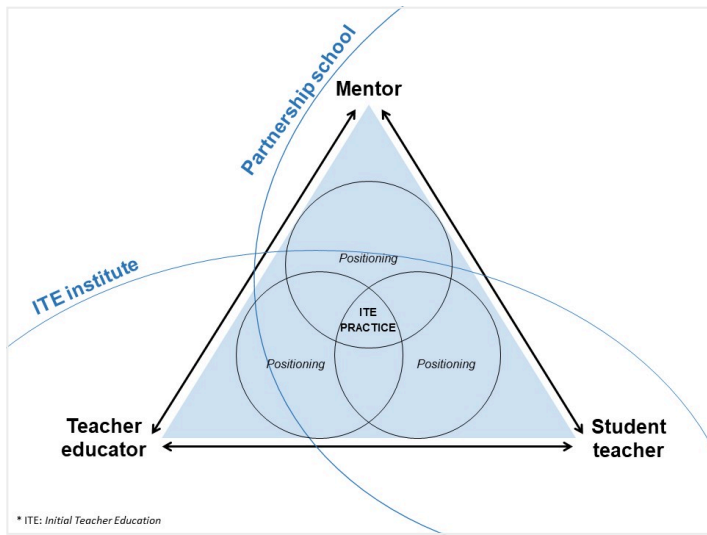
Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results achieved so far

ReConTEP's ambitious goal to understand the content of teacher educators' professionalism as enacted in practice, fed into a two-stage research process which combined theoretical work and an empirical case-study. The first stage of the research incorporated examination and redefinition of our current way of seeing teacher educator professionalism. While research warns us against the claim that there is a recipe book to teaching, still the dominant discourse in research and policy evokes the notion of general, context-free knowledge and skills that individual teacher educators acquire, possess and perform. This logic is often associated with expectations of uniformity and standardisation, as evidenced in the teacher educator standards being furthered in many European countries. Through a critical examination of these initiatives, ReConTEP has shown how teacher educator standards appeal to a 'technicist' model of teacher education and, in so doing, fail to account for the complex, relational and contextualised nature of teacher educator professionalism. In response to this, a novel theoretical lens in the form of a conception of enacted professionalism was developed. A conception of enacted professionalism gives center stage to what teacher educators actually do in practice, at a particular moment in time, in a particular context. It concerns professionalism as enacted by teacher educators, as engaged in their professional activities, as opposed to a conception of teacher educator professionalism as what is demanded from teacher educators by reference to professional standards. This reinterpretation of professionalism serves as a powerful theoretical and analytical resource for research on teacher educator professionalism, as well as a useful practical tool to support the professional development of this occupational group. This theoretical work informed the second stage of the research in which the proposed theoretical lens was operationalised and tested in practice through a multiple case-study design which successfully combined the voices and experiences of 11 teacher educators, 22 student teachers and 22 school-based mentors. The main data were gathered from observing each teacher educator on two supervisory conferences during student teachers' internships. Drawing on positioning theory as developed in the field of social psychology, these supervisory conferences were framed as discursive practices in which teacher educators position both themselves and others (i.e. student teachers and school-based mentors) in particular ways. In so doing, they negotiate locally the meanings of good

teaching, and divide responsibility amongst 'the world of practice' and 'the world of theory' in the process of learning to teach. These observational data were complemented by short interviews with teacher educators, student teachers and mentors a few days after each observation, a cycle of biographical interviews with teacher educators, and document analysis (e.g. lesson evaluation forms). Data analysis is ongoing and aims to build a typology of the different subject positions that teacher educators, mentors and student teachers 'use' in the supervisory conferences, and how this affects student teachers' (opportunities for) learning.

Progress beyond the state of the art and expected potential impact (including the socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project so far)

ReConTEP's direct focus on teacher educators was unique and highly innovative in and of itself. This occupational group has long been ignored by researchers and policymakers alike who operated from an assumption that being a good teacher of elementary or secondary students is a necessary and sufficient preparation for educating teachers. This situation is changing slowly, as agreement is building around the fact that the work of educating teachers requires additional preparation and expertise. In many countries, the growing appreciation of teacher educators' centrality in the pedagogies and practices of initial teacher education is met with the development of professional standards for this occupational group, following the widespread model of standards for teachers (e.g. the US, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia). A professional standard benchmarks the minimum levels of achievement for teacher educators; it guarantees a level of quality of teacher education; and makes clear what teacher educators should know and be able to do – the imperative revealing the normative orientation of this way of seeing teacher educator professionalism. ReConTEP has added significantly to our understanding of how this standards agenda, and the mechanisms for control associated with it, attend to particular aspects of teacher educator professionalism, but also elide other aspects of that professionalism. More in particular, the project has demonstrated how the dominant logic in teacher education research and policy selects for our attention the individual teacher educator and the technical knowledge and skills s/he possess, but fails to account for the complex, relational and contextualised nature of the work. In response to this, ReConTEP has offered an alternative theoretical lens which allows to study professionalism as enacted in practice. The proposed framework of enacted professionalism gives centre stage to teacher educators' actions, judgments and deliberations in workaday practice, acknowledging that these always operate in a broader relational and organisational context, hence avoiding the pitfalls associated with the dominant way of seeing teacher educator professionalism as context-free and individualistic. As a result of the successful operationalisation of the framework by drawing on recent developments in positioning theory, ReConTEP has offered an entirely new line of inquiry to this burgeoning field of research (and the neighbouring field of teacher professionalism), but also serves as a signpost of multidisciplinary research, combining insights from education and social psychology.



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