

Chapter 2

Understanding Teacher Educators' Work and Identities

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Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the work and identities of teacher educators. We know that teacher education is a broad, heterogeneous and differentiated field (or area), within which individual teacher educators undertake many different types of work. Consequently, there are on-going debates about who can be defined as a teacher educator and why. In this chapter we define teacher educators as teachers of teachers, engaged in the induction and professional learning of future teachers through pre-service courses and/or the further development of serving teachers through in-service courses.

The chapter is structured in the following way: in the next section we draw on relevant scholarship and research from sociological and historical analyses of teacher education to identify some of the major tensions and issues within our field. We then follow up this introductory section with specific illustrations from three national contexts – England, Israel and the Netherlands. These sections explore something of the specificity of teacher education in our different countries, thereby acknowledging the differentiated ways in which educational policies and practices act to structure the national and institutional contexts for teacher educators' work and identities.

But at the same time as acknowledging this specificity, our accounts also serve to identify some of the commonalities in teacher educators' work and ways of understanding their professional roles and identities across our differing national contexts. In particular, we identify the centrality in teacher educators' work of professional responsibilities and values, of pedagogies for teacher education, and of scholarship. We also argue that teacher educators need to be seen as a unique occupational group with distinctive knowledge, skills and understanding about teacher education and its importance for schooling.

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Contextualising Factors

As Chapter 1 has established, teacher education is framed by the specific political and social frameworks for schooling and pre- and in-service teacher education in different national contexts. In addition to the factors discussed in Chapter 1, there are some common trends in the development of teacher education across Europe which we can trace. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2004) reports that for more than a decade teacher education has been high on the political agenda in many countries as a critical lever to produce educational change. In these countries changing teacher education has been a key strategy in attempts to reconstruct schooling to achieve altered models of teacher professionalism. Cochrane-Smith (2005, p. 3) has identified that in such policy formulations, teacher education is positioned as a 'public policy problem'. The quest of policymakers then becomes to unearth a formula for 'what works' in terms of reforming the curricula, pedagogies and assessment modes used in teacher education in order to 'drive up' teacher quality and the attainment of pupils. The results of such quests often work to re-position teacher education as a technical rational enterprise of designing and regulating courses to ensure that teachers attain specified 'competences' or 'standards' that are allegedly needed for effective teaching. We see these attempts to re-position teacher education as ignoring the complexity of the teaching and learning process involved in pre-service and in-service teacher education. Standards for teacher educators have been developed within the ATE, the Association of Teacher Education (see Fig. 2.1) and within the VELON, the Dutch Association of Teacher Educators (VELON) (see Fig. 2.2).

As Chapter 1 has signalled, the relationships between teacher education and the school sector are crucial to understanding our field and the positions of teacher educators working within it. Whilst pre- and in-service teacher education programmes are usually located in higher education institutions of some sort, our field is also centrally concerned with schooling. This fundamental dualism is captured in the words of William Taylor (1983, p. 41):

Teacher education is Janus-faced. In the one direction it faces classroom and school, with their demands for relevance, practicality, competence, technique. In the other it faces the university and the world of research, with their stress on scholarship, theoretical fruitfulness and disciplinary rigour.

Whilst models of the ways in which higher education institutions work 'in partnership' with schools vary from country to country (and from institution to institution), at the most basic level of their work all teacher education works with this dualism. For example, for teacher educators involved in supervising pre-service students on field work experiences (or teaching practices) out in schools or working with serving teachers on in-service courses, this dualism and its part in influencing the knowledge, skills and understanding which they require is only too evident.

A further factor in understanding the field of teacher education is that, in many countries, it has a specific history of gender and power relations, rooted in the social and intellectual 'poverty' of the Normal Schools or Teacher Training Colleges of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One consequence of these 'humble'