Professional development of teacher educators: what do they do? Findings from an explorative international study

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The attention being devoted to teacher educators as professionals and their professional development is unquestionably increasing. Whilst much of that attention is being directed at teacher educators in different countries, international comparisons have been quite rare to date. The research question addressed in this study was: ‘Do experienced teacher educators from different countries differ in their concerns, professional development activities and developmental goals?’

Interviews were conducted with 25 participants from 10 different countries, all of whom were experienced teacher educators. Teacher educators’ concerns varied in the course of their careers. During their induction their primary focus tended to be on survival, whereas later on in their careers their concerns became linked to their own professional identity and their students as individuals. Participants from all the participating countries were involved in a range of developmental activities. A large majority was involved in research-related activities which they perceived as an important tool in their professional development. All the participants had plans for their further professional development but sometimes foresaw hindrances to the realisation of those plans, such as a lack of resources and time. The interview data did not provide evidence to suggest clear country-specific differences. In fact, the opposite would appear to be the case: teacher educators from different countries seem to have similar concerns, and their current professional development activities and plans for future development are also quite comparable.

**Keywords:** professional development; teacher educators; international comparison; international research

**Introduction**

There is growing recognition that teacher educators can only continue to act as professionals if they are engaged in further professional development throughout their entire career. In the slipstream of the broadly acknowledged views on improving teacher education there is growing focus on the qualities of teacher educators involved in teaching the next generations of teachers (ETUCE [European Trade Union Committee for Education] 2008). This attention is mainly restricted to workforce...
concerns; that is, how to ensure sufficient numbers of novice teacher educators (Snoek et al. 2011).

Mc Gee and Lawrence (2009, p. 140) argue that: ‘Teacher educators work with teachers to promote and support professional learning, and so their own professional learning is particularly important. It is surprising, therefore, to find that the professional learning of teacher educators is often neglected’. Teacher educators themselves as a professional group are increasingly aware of the need to continue to work on their competences and they acknowledge the importance of being – or becoming – lifelong learners who keep in touch with the latest developments and insights in their own field (Swennen and Van der Klink 2009).

In this article we use the following definition of teacher educators proposed by, among others, Dengerink et al.: Higher Education academic staff with a responsibility for teacher education, research or subject studies and didactics, as well as teaching practice supervisors, school mentors, induction tutors and supporters of induction networks, and also those in charge of teachers’ continuous professional development. (2015, p. 79)

This article investigates the professional development of experienced teacher educators and adopts Kari Smith’s conceptualization of professional development as a development that takes place after a person has started working as a teacher educator. There is, however, no fixed route to be followed in professional development, nor is there an end to the development as long as teacher educators are working in their profession (Smith 2003, p. 203).

This article is structured in the following way. The first part provides an overview of the few studies that used an international lens when investigating professional development, followed by a brief overview of the different aspects of teacher educators’ professional development that were reported in local studies. Attention is then paid to the method and findings of a research study carried out by members of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) Research and Development Community (RDC) ‘Professional Development of Teacher Educators’, focusing on the professional development of experienced teacher educators in different countries.

International comparisons of teacher educators’ professional development

In the past few decades we have seen an increasing interest in researching teacher educators’ professional development, but thus far the research has focused largely on local studies that offer insights into professional development within particular countries. Despite the growing need to exchange information on current practices within European Union Member States and to align teacher educators’ continuous professional development at European Union level (see, for example, European Commission 2013), research projects that purposefully compare different countries in this respect remain rather few and far between. This does not imply that teacher educators are ignoring international developments or that they do not have an eye for what is happening abroad, since international networks such as the European Network on Teacher Education Policies, the ATEE and the International Professional Development Association are flourishing.

What tends to be lacking in the literature is an international comparison of professional development, which was, for example, signalled and emphasized by
Murray et al. (2009) in their illustrations of teacher educators working in different national contexts and how these may affect teacher educators’ work and identities. Until now, only a few studies have been conducted with the intention of facilitating international comparisons of teacher educators’ professional development.

One such study entailed an international comparison of teacher educators in their induction phase in different countries across the globe, and was conducted by members of the ATEE RDC ‘Professional Development of Teacher Educators’. This interview-based study revealed that the induction experiences of participants were very much alike (see Van Velzen et al. 2010). Novice teacher educators indicated that during their first years they are faced with an immense workload, which is not only caused by the work duties as such but is also affected by their insecurity about what is expected from them (Van Velzen et al. 2010).

Kosnik et al. (2013) studied literacy/English teacher educators working in Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United Kingdom and the USA and found that their work is demanding and appreciation by colleagues and students is rare, which hinders them in performing research-related and scholarly activities. This study did not provide any evidence of differences between countries, but it is unclear whether the researchers were actually looking for country-specific patterns in their data.

Snoek et al. (2011) reported on policy measures aimed at enhancing the professionalism of teacher educators in 16 European countries (primarily European Union Member States), and found that, despite significant differences between countries at the systemic level of teacher education, a prudent and deliberate consideration of the advancement of lifelong professional development had not yet taken place in any of the 16 countries.

Altogether, the few studies that have been conducted can be characterized as small-sample studies which serve to stress the need to further intensify the research on international comparisons.

Evidence from local studies on teacher educators’ professional development

Studies on professional development have focused on the significance of concerns, activities and context.

Drawing on the work of Conway and Clark (2003), Dengerink et al. (2015) reported a pattern in their study on the professional development of Dutch teacher educators. They observed a shift in teacher educators’ personal focus from concerns about their personal classroom management capacities to concerns about their personal ability to grow as a teacher and person. Their findings are supported by studies on the induction of teacher educators (Murray and Harrison 2008, Swennen and Van der Klink 2009, Van Velzen et al. 2010, White 2013) which reported that the main concern during the induction phase is merely ‘to survive’ and to find out what it means to be a teacher educator and to become engaged in the shift from teacher to second-order teacher (Murray and Male 2005). This shift in concerns is partly explained as soon as we take into account the tasks teacher educators perform. Duties in the further course of their career differ from those in the early years. Whereas in their induction phase most teacher educators are involved primarily in student-related work duties, later in their career their involvement in coordinating and managerial duties, research and mentoring increases (Ben-Peretz 2001). As teacher educators become more experienced, they need to be able to cope with the institutional pressure to maintain high standards, to deliver sufficient research
outputs and to succeed in winning competitive grants and tenders. The latter is especially important when it comes to advanced academic promotion since the number of publications in refereed journals serves as the main criterion (Smith 2005).

With regard to professional development activities, the studies conducted by, for example, Koster et al. (2008) and Ben-Peretz et al. (2010) indicated that the professional development of teacher educators comprises various types of learning, ranging from implicit ways of learning to deliberate actions to advance one’s own competences. Drawing on her own involvement and experiences, Smith (2003) put forward a number of suggestions for encouraging professional development, such as attending academic studies, participation in seminars and workshops, staff development and feedback on one’s own teaching. Her suggestions point to the diverse nature of professional development activities: formal and informal, as well as individual and team-based activities are seen as conducive to professional development.

These various kinds of learning activities differ, however, in their impact on teacher educators. Research-related activities in particular, such as self-study and inquiry, are often seen as important activities when it comes to the advancement of one’s professional development (Cochran-Smith 2003, 2005, Loughran and Berry 2005, Lunenberg and Willemse 2006, Zeichner 2007) and the innovation of teaching practices. Teacher educators’ research is usually less focused on contributing to the academic knowledge base, but the current process of universification (Ball 1998) of teacher education that aims at improving its academic status is likely to enhance those kinds of research that explicitly focus on generating academic knowledge through, for example, PhD trajectories.

Professional development activities and concerns are fuelled by the context in which they occur. Concerns and activities are not only linked to individual preferences but also triggered by the quality requirements set by others, such as the teacher education institutes, the government or the teacher education profession (Kennedy 2005). Over the past decade there has been much discussion on national or even international teacher educator standards (e.g. in the ATEE) and how these may be linked to teacher educators’ professional development. In the Netherlands, for example, standards were developed and safeguarded by the professional association for teacher educators (Velon) (see Koster and Dengerink 2001) and since their introduction a considerable number of teacher educators have been undergoing assessments based on these standards. Here, the standards serve as a way to scaffold professional development in a voluntary and meaningful manner.

There are various measures that teacher education institutes can implement themselves to encourage their teacher educators’ professional development. Smith (2003) pointed out the responsibility of teacher education institutes to encourage and steer the professional development of their staff. She recommended measures that are reasonably easy to implement, such as the organization of regular staff meetings, the use of action learning within teams, arranging feedback from supervisors, colleagues and students and the observation of experienced colleagues. There is growing support for the belief that the most powerful learning experiences take place as a result of being part of a community, network or team, and that learning between members is perhaps even more meaningful than individual learning, as Barak et al. (2010) advocated, which suggests that organizing team-related ways of working could have a significant impact on teacher educators’ professional development.
As well as highlighting measures designed to encourage professional development, the research revealed inhibitors such as lack of time, a considerable workload, lack of resources, absence of managerial attention for and reinforcement of professional development, and an unproductive working climate (Van Velzen et al. 2010, Snoek et al. 2011). However, it is too easy to pinpoint context barriers as the sole explanation for the reluctance to become engaged in professional development activities. At the individual level there are also barriers that can hinder professional development, such as fear of change and a lack of interest in innovative ideas. Professional development is not only about learning, but also entails unlearning and challenging one’s own beliefs and views, which demands that professionals leave their comfort zone. For many, this is an undesirable and unpleasant experience (Smith 2003).

To summarize, there are different aspects that are significant when it comes to understanding the professional development of teacher educators, and these have been briefly discussed in this section. As outlined in this and the previous sections, research findings are mainly derived from studies carried out in a single country and this present study therefore has an international scope, and aims to identify country-specific differences or similarities in teacher educators’ professional development. The following research question guided the research study: do experienced teacher educators from different countries differ in their concerns, professional development activities and developmental goals?

**Methodology**

This present study was carried out by members of the ATEE RDC ‘Professional Development of Teacher Educators’. Members of this Community initiated the project during a meeting at one of the annual ATEE conferences. At the meeting, certain members expressed their common interest in exploring whether teacher educators from different countries differ from each other in terms of their concerns, professional development activities and developmental goals. Several members from different countries wanted to participate in the project and decided to work together. The project itself was therefore an example of international collaboration. Because of its focus on exploration, this study does not aim to deliver statistical proof for international differences or similarities between teacher educators. Instead, it should be seen as a qualitative exploration.

The study focused on experienced teacher educators with at least five years – and no more than 20 years – of experience as a teacher educator. Participants were approached by members of the ATEE RDC. As Appendix 1 shows, 25 teacher educators participated in this study. The majority of the participants were from the Netherlands, Israel and Japan (five from each country). But participants from other countries were also included, namely Australia (n = 1), The Czech Republic (n = 1), Belgium (Flanders) (n = 1), Slovenia (n = 2), Spain (n = 2), Turkey (n = 2) and the United Kingdom (n = 1). In total, participants from 10 countries were included.

A highly-structured interview guideline was formulated to ensure sufficient opportunities for comparison between the interviewees’ answers. Existing research instruments were inspected and all RDC members were involved in the process of composing the final interview guideline. The selection of the interview questions was informed primarily by the work of Conway and Clark (2003) on concerns and Smith’s (2003) work on professional development activities. The interview guideline
comprised three sections: general background; concerns during the career; and professional development activities. The questions in the general background section were about age, country, number of years of experience as a teacher educator, teaching tasks, subjects taught and the kind of teacher education programme (primary and/or secondary education). The questions in the second section were about the main concerns experienced at the start of the participants’ career as a teacher educator and the concerns that participants were experiencing at the time of the interview. In the third section of the interview, questions were asked about involvement in research and other professional development activities that had been undertaken recently and how (and to what extent) these activities contributed to participants’ professional development. In addition, questions were asked about their plans for future professional development activities and the drivers and barriers impacting their own professional development.

Interviews were conducted by 14 members of the RDC ‘Professional Development of Teacher Educators’. Each participating country had one RDC member who carried out the interviews, except for Israel and the Netherlands where three RDC members conducted the interviews. The interview guideline was available in English. The participating RDC members each interviewed one or more teacher educators in their own language. All interviews were transcribed and sent to the interviewees for their approval of the interview report. The interviews were translated into English by the RDC members for analysis.

The initial analysis of the interview reports revealed broad themes which were then further analysed using the qualitative analysis program Atlas.ti 5.0. Per interview, question codes were linked to interview fragments and then all fragments with the same code were carefully examined, which often resulted in the addition of sub-codes. The sub-coding was performed based on the principles of ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967), allowing the codes to emerge ‘naturally’ from the data. Lastly, the interview data with the same code were then summarized into text fragments and checked by another author to ensure a sufficient fit between the data and the description in the article.

Several measures were taken to safeguard the quality of the analysis. In some cases where interview fragments were difficult to interpret, the interviewer who conducted that particular interview was asked for an additional explanation. Member check took place in the following form: a first draft of the results was presented at the ATEE 2011 conference to an international audience of teacher educators, and summarized versions of the findings were discussed at various meetings of the RDC.

Findings

Backgrounds

The majority of the participants was female \( n = 16, 64\% \) and between 40 and 49 years of age. More than one-half of the interviewees \( n = 15, 60\% \) (five from Japan, five from the Netherlands, three from Israel, one from Belgium, one from the United Kingdom) had a master’s degree, and the other 10 (40%) (two from Israel, two from Slovenia, two from Spain, two from Turkey, one from Australia, one from The Czech Republic) had a PhD.
Thirteen participants had 10–15 years of experience as a teacher educator. Three interviewees (two from Israel, one from Belgium) had more than 15 years of experience. The remaining seven interviewees had less than 10 years of experience. The majority (n = 19, 76%) of the participants had teaching experience before they were appointed as a teacher educator. Eleven had worked as teachers in secondary education, six had worked as teachers in primary education, one had worked as a teacher in vocational and adult education and one had been a university lecturer. Six participants (three from Israel, two from the Netherlands, one from Slovenia) had experience in non-teaching jobs, such as a position at the Ministry of Education or a developer of course materials.

The majority of the participants held positions as teacher educators at a university (n = 17, 68%). Five participants were also working at an autonomous teacher education institute, and three (all from the Netherlands) were combining their work as a teacher educator with job positions at other institutes for higher education.

Most participants (n = 18, 72%) were involved in teaching subjects (e.g., mathematics, language), accounting for between 10 and 70% of their working hours. Finally, three participants mentioned that alongside their teaching duties they also had to perform managerial tasks.

When exploring the backgrounds from a country-specific angle, similarities were found in working experience and teaching experience prior to becoming a teacher educator. The tasks of teacher educators vary greatly, but there were no obvious country-specific differences.

There did appear to be differences in the job positions: most participants were working at a university, except the participants from the Netherlands. This might be

Table 1. Percentage of working hours dedicated to various tasks, per country.
due to the educational system in the Netherlands, where most student-teachers are educated in Universities of Applied Sciences or in autonomous teacher education institutes. There also appeared to be a slight difference in the academic degrees held by the participants: none of the Japanese or Dutch participants had a PhD.

**Concerns during induction and current concerns**

Interviewees were asked to name the concerns they had when they started as a teacher educator and their main concerns at the time of the interview. In total, 22 participants identified one or more concerns that they had encountered ‘back then’ and 23 mentioned one or more concerns they were experiencing ‘now’. Six interviewees indicated that the concerns they had ‘back then’ were the same as the concerns they had ‘now’, including all five Japanese interviewees. Two participants (from Slovenia and Turkey) said they had no concerns and one participant (Australia) did not answer the question.

Table 2 presents these concerns and their frequency, indicating that some concerns were mentioned more often as concerns ‘back then’ and other concerns were mentioned more frequently as current concerns, whereas some concerns were encountered almost equally frequently ‘back then’ and ‘now’. Concerns that featured at the beginning of participants’ teacher educator careers were typical ‘survival and doing’ induction issues, such as getting familiar with what it means to be a teacher educator, finding out what to do and getting used to the university or institute, instruction of students and wondering whether their (past) experience is adequate, as the following interview fragments illustrate:
my obvious intention was to develop my ability and to professionalise further as a teacher educator. (Israel)

To be able to make the mental switch with regard to the age of my students; whereas I was experienced with high-school kids, I would now have to deal with older audiences. (Israel)

The concerns participants were experiencing ‘now’ appeared to be somewhat different, and had to do with reflecting on one’s own job and roles and devoting more attention to the students as individuals and to their growth as a teacher. In fact the interview data revealed a shift from surviving and teacher-centred views towards a reflective and student-centred view, which was particularly present in the interviews with Israeli and Dutch participants:

My interpersonal dialog: what is the “teacher educator” character I would like to achieve? (Israel)

I have changed in the way I coach students in their development. It is my challenge to find out how I can bring a student further in his or her own process of development. I do not simply apply a technique any more (as I did when I just started as a teacher educator, because using techniques at that time provided me with some feeling of ‘security’), but I am more experienced now and I have much more to offer students. (The Netherlands)

Participants also mentioned concerns during the induction that continued to be a concern ‘now’, such as responsibility as a teacher educator and the need to improve teacher education, stimulate students and ‘maintain quality in one’s teaching’:

Accountability: to work with student teachers is a major responsibility. I had sleepless nights after I had observed a bad lesson. Will I trust this pre-service teacher to teach my children? Will I allow generations to suffer because of my decision? (Israel)

When we considered the concerns, we found that the observed patterns as described applied to participants from all countries. There were no obvious country-specific exceptions.

Engagement in professional development activities

All participants were currently attending (or had recently been involved in) learning activities such as training courses, seminars, workshops, conferences and courses about a wide range of subjects, varying from teaching specific subjects to the use of information and communications technologies and pedagogical and general teaching skills.

In addition to these organized learning activities, the participants also mentioned learning activities embedded in their daily work, such as attending meetings, discussions and consulting colleagues. Several participants mentioned their role in mentoring or coaching new colleagues as a professional development activity. Activities demanding very intensive and close collaboration, such as working together on innovative ideas, doing research together or team teaching, visiting schools and learning from (feedback from) students, were mentioned less frequently. However, participants’ answers do not always provide sufficient details to assess properly the exact nature of their collaboration.

The activities mentioned by participants from different countries were very much alike. The similarities far outweighed the differences.
There are, however, some activities that are worth mentioning because they seem to be country specific. In the Netherlands there is an association of teacher educators called Velon, which organizes conferences for teacher educators and offers a registration trajectory with an assessment procedure for registering oneself as a teacher educator. Several of the Dutch participants mentioned that they attended these conferences and/or the registration trajectory. They stressed the importance of these activities for their professional development.

In Japan, four out of five participants mentioned activities in which professional development was taking place in – or together with – schools; for example, ‘going to a school, conducting an interview and observing teachers’ or ‘exchanging information and know-hows in an informal group of economics teachers, economic analysts and teachers in lower secondary school’. Although some participants from other countries also mentioned visits to schools (one from the Netherlands, one from The Czech Republic, one from Spain), it was striking that the Japanese participants mentioned this so often.

In Israel, participants expressed their appreciation of specific courses for teacher educators offered by the Mofet Institute, a consortium of Israeli colleges of education that specializes in research, curriculum and programme development for teacher educators.

At the time of the interview, almost all of the participants (all except one from Israel and two from the Netherlands) were engaged in research and/or research-related scholarly activities. Participants were involved in different kinds of research, such as working on their PhD (mentioned by three participants; two Israeli and one from the United Kingdom) or conducting research closely related to their teaching subjects or to innovating their own teaching through design-based research or self-study. In addition to research, other activities were mentioned, such as designing new courses or adjusting courses and materials. Participants experienced these scholarly activities as very conducive to their own professional development or their career, or found that they served more general purposes. Statements from participants indicated that these were helping them to become better teacher educators:

Thanks to the research I now understand the needs of teachers better, their obstacles, why they believe or do not believe in innovations. I teach better. (Czech Republic)

It is an appropriate addition to my CV and an important asset in my academic advancement. (Israel)

It makes me a lot happier […] it made me more confident. (The Netherlands)

No country-specific patterns could be observed in relation to the reported learning activities.

Drivers and barriers impacting professional development

We asked participants about the factors that were encouraging for their own professional development. Only a few participants referred to encouraging conditions within their own institute. The vast majority stated that encouragements were strongly related to their own motivation and needs, as the following interview fragments illustrate:
I haven’t done enough yet with regard to conducting research. Even more so with writing. I would like to be able to share and disseminate the knowledge I have acquired. (Israel)

The inner need to keep moving; the passion to keep learning. (Israel)

I want to continue to develop myself. That is more of a personal motivation. (The Netherlands)

As well as encouragements, participants were also asked to identify barriers that were hindering their own current and future professional development. Not surprisingly, lack of time was mentioned by almost all participants from all countries. This lack of time had to do with too many competing work tasks or the difficulties related to balancing between work and other responsibilities (family, children).

Finally, participants were asked to state how their own department and the broader institute were supporting their professional development. The answers revealed that there are three broad reactions to professional development issues. Firstly, a few participants stated that they enjoyed a supportive environment:

I’m very much stimulated by management to get involved in professional development. There is a very positive climate toward professional development in our institute. (The Netherlands)

There were also participants who were receiving mixed messages, and, finally, there were participants who were not getting any support at all:

To be honest I do not perceive any support. (Belgium)

I do not think my team leader is very interested in what I am doing to develop myself. (The Netherlands)

Some participants referred to particular issues in their own country:

Teacher education in Australia is still an under-researched and under-funded area of inquiry. (Australia)

Unfortunately there is no systematic support of professional development of teacher educators in the Czech Republic. (The Czech Republic)

The Spanish education system is a hindrance and bureaucracy is slow and complicated. (Spain)

In summary, participants from all countries mentioned that their professional development was strongly related to their own intrinsic motivation. All participants experienced hindrances relating to a lack of time caused by a heavy workload, and a few participants experienced encouragement from their managers. Some participants referred to issues that appear to be country specific.

**Future plans for professional development activities**

Except for one Israeli participant who was on the verge of retirement, all of the participants had ideas about their future professional development. Participants’ answers varied widely, but nevertheless three types of activities were mentioned quite often.

Firstly, conducting research and writing articles was very popular. This was mentioned by 13 participants (three from Israel, three from Japan, one from the Netherlands, one from Australia, one from The Czech Republic, two from Spain, one from Turkey, one from the United Kingdom). Secondly, seven participants (from Israel,
the Netherlands, Slovenia and Turkey) expressed a desire to become more internationally oriented (e.g. through attending international conferences or working in international research and other projects). Two other participants (from Spain and The Czech Republic) did not really mention the international orientation but did express a desire to improve their foreign language skills (English) which can also be seen as helping towards becoming more active outside their own country. Thirdly, attending courses and workshops was mentioned seven times (Israel, the Netherlands, Turkey), but the subjects varied strongly from leadership/management and teaching qualities to information and communications technology-related topics.

Finally, the most remarkable activity was raised by the Belgian participant who wanted to take time to think about a successor since he was due to retire shortly.

Future plans for professional development looked very similar for participants from the different countries. With the exception of the Israeli participant who was about to retire, teacher educators from all of the countries involved had plans for future development and there were no obvious differences between them.

**Conclusion and discussion**

This research study was conducted by members of the RDC ‘Professional Development of Teacher Educators’ and consisted of 25 structured interviews with experienced teacher educators with at least five years of experience. Most of the participants were working in the Netherlands, Israel and Japan, whilst the remaining seven were based in other countries.

The participants’ accounts suggest that concerns about their work did vary and shift during their career. At the start of their career as a teacher educator, most participants experienced concerns that are quite characteristic for the induction phase and that can be labelled as surviving in a new and complex context as mentioned by Van Velzen et al. (2010). As teacher educators become more advanced, their concerns change accordingly and shift towards concerns about their own identity (what kind of teacher educator do I want to become?) and about their students as individuals with different ambitions and needs. Their concerns at the time of the interview seemed related to the more ‘mature’ professional, who was creating space for reflection on how best to educate student-teachers. These findings are consistent with those described by Conway and Clark (2003) and Dengerink et al. (2015). Since we did not observe country-specific differences, this shift in focus over the course of the career would appear to be a universal phenomenon.

Participants’ professional development consisted of a mix of learning activities, which were valued highly in terms of supporting one’s professional development. Attending conferences, courses, workshops or training was mentioned by participants from all countries, as were work-embedded forms of professional development such as team meetings, collegial consultation and collaboration with colleagues. The observation that several participants in this study mentioned their role as a mentor or coach for new colleagues might be related to the fact that all of the participants are experienced teacher educators, which makes them eligible candidates to mentor a junior colleague. According to the participants in this study, the mentoring process itself is not only beneficial for the mentee, but also for the mentor.

Research appeared to contribute significantly to professional development. Over one-half of the participants were ‘research-active’, and this was often perceived by them as a way to keep in touch with the latest developments and to contribute
actively to enlarging the body of knowledge. Writing research articles was seen as an activity with a high learning value. The fact that articles can be distributed easily among colleagues and can be regarded as a visible token of someone’s expertise may well also contribute to the positive perceptions attached to writing articles. However, the precise nature of their research endeavours was not always clear. A few of them were involved in long-term research linked to their PhD degree, but other interview reports were less clear or did not provide details on the exact nature of the research activities conducted. Nevertheless, these findings do indicate that being research-active is becoming a less uncommon part of professional development, which is also advocated in present policy papers as a means of improving the status of the teacher educator profession (Snoek et al. 2011, Lunenberg et al. 2014). The prominent role of research may also reflect the process of universalization (Ball 1998) that puts higher research demands on teacher educators to earn respect in academia and can be regarded as a response to the expressed need to build research capacity amongst teacher educators conducting research in their own field of teacher education, as Murray et al. (2009) and others argued. However, fewer of the participants from the Netherlands were involved in research than participants from other countries. This might be due to the fact that they tend not to work at traditional universities but are employed at Universities of Applied Sciences, where research is a relatively new task (Willemse and Boei 2013).

Encouragement to enrol in professional development activities was often lacking, but most participants expressed a strong internal motivation to continue to develop professionally. Some participants mentioned country-specific hindrances, but the question remains whether these hindrances are genuinely country specific. The existence of national bodies such as the association of teacher educators in the Netherlands (Velon) or the lifelong learning institute for teacher educators in Israel (Mofet), however, are proving to be very supportive in encouraging teacher educators to be engaged in professional development activities outside their own daily work settings, as the accounts of Dutch and Israeli participants revealed.

Participants did have ideas for future professional development activities and most of them had quite clear ideas about what they want to learn. Interviewees from all countries expressed the wish for a stronger international orientation and most of them wanted to become more research-active. Whilst the participants did have plans for their own future development, they were also experiencing difficulties in finding sufficient resources, time and money for their existing activities, and sometimes these difficulties were also echoed in their answers regarding their future activities.

Altogether the findings do not allow the drawing of firm conclusions regarding country-specific patterns in professional development. We conclude from our explorative study that teacher educators from different countries are perhaps more alike than we had expected, a conclusion that was also reported by Van Velzen et al. (2010) in their research on teacher educator induction across Europe. The lack of clear differences could be seen as support for generalizing our findings or the findings from previous local studies that were conducted in a single country. We consider our study to be explorative in nature and therefore we would like to recommend more substantial international studies which further examine concerns, preferences, goals and activities in the various career stages of teacher educators. More research evidence is needed to compose a body of knowledge to inform the international community of teacher educators, their employers, professional associations and policy-makers.
As we experienced throughout the entire research project, conducting a study that involves data collection in various countries means encountering many differences that are linked to languages and cultures. We have reason to believe that concepts (e.g. the concept concerns) are understood differently in, for example, Israel, the Netherlands and Japan. Finally we would like to advocate that international associations such as the International Professional Development Association and the ATEE provide interesting platforms for teacher educators for the sharing and comparing of practices, experiences and country-specific interpretations of concepts. Moreover, these associations may fuel the need for further in-depth research into the international comparison of the professional development of teacher educators. These activities are a promising step towards fulfiment of the wish to participate in international networks as was expressed by teacher educators in this study.

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### Appendix 1. Backgrounds of the participating teacher educators

| Country                  | Gender | Age  | Academic qualification | Experience as teacher educator | Work base                                                                 |
|--------------------------|--------|------|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Australia                | 1      | 3    | 3                      | 14                             | 1                                                                         |
| The Czech Republic       | 1      | 3    | 3                      | 11                             | 1                                                                         |
| Belgium                  | 2      | 4    | 2                      | 19                             | 1, 2                                                                      |
| Israel                   | 1      | 6    | 2                      | 20                             | 3                                                                         |
| Israel                   | 1      | 3    | 2                      | 13                             | 1, 3                                                                      |
| Israel                   | 1      | 3    | 2                      | 13                             | 1                                                                         |
| Israel                   | 1      | 2    | 3                      | 8                              | 3                                                                         |
| Israel                   | 1      | 4    | 3                      | 18                             | 1                                                                         |
| Japan                    | 2      | 3    | 2                      | 12                             | 1                                                                         |
| Japan                    | 2      | 4    | 2                      | 8                              | 1                                                                         |
| Japan                    | 2      | 3    | 2                      | 9                              | 1                                                                         |
| Japan                    | 1      | 3    | 2                      | 8                              | 1                                                                         |
| Japan                    | 2      | 3    | 2                      | 13                             | 1                                                                         |
| The Netherlands          | 1      | 3    | 2                      | 12                             | 3                                                                         |
| The Netherlands          | 1      | 4    | 2                      | 10                             | 3                                                                         |
| The Netherlands          | 1      | 3    | 2                      | 10                             | 1                                                                         |
| The Netherlands          | 1      | 3    | 2                      | 10                             | 2                                                                         |
| The Netherlands          | 2      | 3    | 2                      | 8                              | 2                                                                         |
| Slovenia                 | 1      | 4    | 3                      | 13                             | 1                                                                         |
| Slovenia                 | 1      | 3    | 3                      | 10                             | 1                                                                         |
| Spain                    | 2      | 3    | 3                      | 5                              | 1                                                                         |
| Spain                    | 1      | 3    | 3                      | 9                              | 1                                                                         |
| Turkey                   | 2      | 2    | 3                      | 12                             | 1                                                                         |
| Turkey                   | 2      | 2    | 3                      | 10                             | 1                                                                         |
| United Kingdom           | 1      | 3    | 2                      | 12                             | 1                                                                         |