

# The induction of teacher educators: the needs of beginning teacher educators

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## **The induction of teacher educators; the needs of beginning teacher educators**

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Institute organises courses for beginning teacher educators and supports their development in different ways.

The limited research indicates that the induction of beginning teacher educators is usually a neglected issue which results in the lack of formal induction and therefore coincidental professional development of these educators. If support from experienced colleagues is provided it is accidental and a lucky event. Most beginning teacher educators have to find their own way and this can lead to a lonely and difficult introduction into their new profession (Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar & Placier, 1995; Murray & Male, 2005; Ritter, 2007).

A situation with so little support is of concern to beginning teacher educators and of the profession in general as it may seriously harm the quality of beginning teacher educators' performance and have a negative impact on the quality of the education of student teachers (e.g. Boyd et al, 2007; Murray, Davison & John, 2007; Swennen. & Van der Klink, in press). A problematic induction period hampers the sharing of knowledge and experiences of teacher educators with new members of the profession which can undermine the building, maintaining and renewing of an accepted knowledge base for teacher educators.

### **What do we know about the induction of teacher educators?**

The induction into a profession is a topic with a long tradition in organizational research, but the results are of limited value to the process of becoming a teacher educator as the induction of teacher educators differs substantially from the induction in most other professions. Much of the prevailing socialization research focuses on neophyte professionals recently graduated and without substantial working experience (e.g. Carr et al., 2006; Eraut, 2007). Usually new members are educated intensively *prior* to entering the profession (e.g. lawyers, engineers) but most new teacher educators are seen as good teachers 'that will also make a good teacher educator' (Korthagen et al., 2005, p.110).

The induction of teacher educators can be seen as a *second phase induction* (Morberg & Eisenschmidt, in press) a transition from one educational workplace to another. Teacher educators are still teachers, but the demands of teaching student teachers are different from teaching pupils and the organisational context within the higher educational system differs from the primary or secondary educational system (Ritter, 2007). In their actual transition teacher educators are thus confronted with a twofold induction: organizational induction into their new work environment, the teacher education institute, and induction into the profession at the same time. A sound framework to describe and explain induction of teacher educators is not well developed and a coherent theory is not available.

In addition to individual reflections on induction experiences, Murray and Male (2005) provided valuable research findings from their study of schoolteachers' transition in the UK. Their findings, based on interviews with 28 novice teacher educators, revealed that newcomers felt they were de-skilled, isolated and insecure about expectations on their performance. According to Murray and Male indicate that the length of the induction period of teacher educators is approximately three years. The authors give three reasons to justify their estimation. Firstly, teacher educators that previously worked as schoolteacher lack understanding of their new profession and they have had little opportunity to prepare themselves prior to their appointment as teacher educator. Secondly, the expert teacher needs to become a novice teacher educator. While their teaching expertise is well identified and developed this expertise now has to be transferred to a new context. Such a transfer requires them to acquire new knowledge, skills and understanding of teaching in the higher education context, regardless their prior teaching experiences within schools. The acquisition of knowledge on teaching and pedagogy seems to be of utmost importance for the transition from teacher to teacher of teacher. And thirdly, the novice teacher educators need to develop research competences if they are to become experts. These competences are generally not part of the teachers' knowledge and experience.

To summarise, induction is a process of becoming a teacher educator which involves two levels. At one level, a type of organisational induction is required in order to become a member of the teacher education institute while on another level beginning educators become members of the profession. Induction for teacher educators is mostly informal, though occasionally some formal arrangements exist, like provisions for mentoring. Induction depends on a mix of organizational conditions and personal characteristics. Prior experience as a schoolteacher might facilitate the induction process; however, at the same time such experience could hinder induction as it prevents new teacher educators taking account of the different context higher education presents. A consequence of this lack of account of difference may also hinder the beginning teacher's appreciation for the need to become engaged in the process of becoming a teacher educator and hence undergo a process of change.

### **Context and methodology**

To undertake a cross national study is not easy. Wubbels (1993) argued in a review of cross national research on learning environments the questionnaires used are frequently not reliable cross-nationally. Because this project was the first to be undertaken the members of the RDC PDTE nevertheless decides to use semi-structured interviews to start with this modest exploraration of the various aspects of current induction practices in their own institutes. During a session they collaboratively developed interview questions that

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Naomi Woman, 1953, the Netherlands Joke	14	BA in English	Lower secondary Education
Man, 1976, the Netherlands Wim	4	MA Dutch language	Lower and higher secondary education degree
Man, 1972 Serbia Javar	11	BA Education, Elementary school Specialization in elementary education	State bar exam for teachers Certificate in teacher's role detection talented children
Man, 1964 Israel David	5	BA Psychology PhD Clinical Psychology	No teaching qualifications
Woman, 1977 the Netherlands Sanne	5	College Higher Education (primary teacher training) Post Higher Education: Arithmetic and Mathematics	Teacher primary education Second grade Arithmetic and Mathematics
Woman, 1959 UK Hilda	17	Ph.D.	PGCE Biology degree
Woman, 1955 USA Tracy	20	Ph.D. in Curriculum and instruction B.M. and M.M. in Music Education	Teacher certificate

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Participants reported that their main tasks were to teach student teachers and to supervise them during their teaching practice. Also frequently listed was participation in all kinds of curriculum development activities. None of the teacher educators mentioned explicitly research as a task. However, two Israeli teacher educators reported that they did join research groups.

It was not the purpose of this research project to strive for representative findings, rather it was the intention to explore contemporary experiences in distinct contexts, to identify the main barriers and facilitating circumstances to induction into the profession of teacher education, to formulate recommendations about induction practices based on these experiences and insights from other studies in this field and to further develop relevant topics that can be investigated in future research.

*I felt undervalued, because no one recognized that I was a beginner. Like the teachers that I teach, I had to find out everything by myself. [Ria]*

The strengths the novice teacher educators mentioned are related to their former teaching experiences and the challenges they mentioned are related to the same themes, like preparation of lessons and working with student teachers. This indicates that, although novice teacher educators are experienced teachers, the former skills and knowledge are not easily transferred to context of teacher education.

### **Formal induction activities**

Participants were invited to reflect upon their participation in formally arranged induction activities such as mentoring, workshops and courses. In total seven participants received some kind of mentoring support. Four participants rated this mentoring as useful or very useful. Three participants viewed that the mentoring was quite insignificant for their induction.

Orna mentioned she received substantial support. Her mentor was the head of the staff and mentoring was included during regular staff meetings. In addition, she had the possibility to phone and e-mail her mentor. She perceived the mentor support as very useful:

*Thanks to that my induction stage went well. My mentor was well accepted socially and had a strong position within the staff. That's why she could give us a better help during our socialisation process. She was something special. She had a combination of supporting without dictating what to do. She left a lot of space for freedom and choice. It was the first time in my life that someone initiated contact with me in order to ask if I needed help. Till then I was used to be the initiator. Sometimes my mentor shared with me what she did in her class and that was a great help. [Orna]*

Sanne stated:

*I needed very much the support of someone where I can fall back on, someone I can go to with all my questions, someone who can give a good advice or feedback. I do not know another way [of] how to get to know the things you should know to do the job in a proper way. [Sanne].*

Issues discussed during mentor meetings varied from subject matters, preparing detailed planning of lessons to reflection on the latest lessons. Javar mentioned talking with his mentor about dilemmas regarding the organization of practice and about teaching demands within a new curriculum. Next to this participants referred to discussions on the supervision of student teachers during their practice in schools, and also there was room to discuss personal issues. For three participants the mentoring was not really an integrated component

*The most valuable example was when discussing the curriculum and debating about student teachers' assessment. Because then I needed very badly a good advice and the long experience of my colleagues. From them I learnt to reflect on every course and lesson. During these opportunities I felt a part of the education staff and I was able to contribute and to learn from practice. [Orna]*

Three teacher educators reported that reflection with their colleagues happened casually and only took place when they took the initiative for it. Most found these talks very useful:

*After my lessons I often went to Paul to talk. We first let off steam. Then we discussed the lesson plan and where it went wrong. We elaborated on that. After that we thought about ideas to improve the next lesson. These talks were a big support. I was able to improve my way of teaching for the next lesson. I sometimes started the lesson with the results of my talk with Paul which worked very well. [Ria].*

It is not clear from the interview data to what extent teacher educators were involved in any structured form of reflection with their colleagues. However, in Israel, reflection is embedded in regular staff meetings and these teacher educators valued this as very useful: *"We used to begin with the events of the last week and to reflect on what happened to the student teachers and what happened to us, teacher educators"*. The other participants emphasised their need to meet on a regular basis to reflect on problems and practical difficulties they faced.

### **Participants own initiatives to enhance their induction**

Seven participants declared that they took several initiatives that proved to support their induction such as *"I asked for information and help from colleagues, observed colleagues at work, and reflect on my work with a colleague"*. The participants' gave suggestions to support their induction, like: *"Some difficulties can be avoided if people in the department pay attention and help with misunderstandings"*. Others complained that they had *"a limited connection with the educational department for general information and had to survive"*.

Participants also suggested the need to *"Organise practice [for them] in real classes for many hours and more opportunities to observe colleagues at work"*. Many mentioned that time constraints thwarted their intentions. They needed more time for scholarly activities, for preparing lessons, for reading relevant articles and attending conferences.

### **Suggestions for improvement of induction practices**

During the interviews participants were invited to raise ideas on how to improve the induction of beginning teacher educators. At the end of the interviews participants again were asked how their induction could be improved.

conversations. Courses and workshops are differently valued. Participants' informal learning depended strongly on the willingness of colleagues to support and to share with these newcomers.

The findings suggest that incidental and occasional learning is characteristic for beginning teacher educators. This conclusion supports the findings of previous studies, like the study conducted by Murray and Male (2005) on induction of teacher educators in the UK. They stated that novice teacher educators are often good teachers of the first order, but they may lack the knowledge that is needed to be good teachers of teachers, in other words: they lack the knowledge and skills to practice second order teaching. None of the teacher educators in our study referred to second order teaching as an important subject. However, we cannot exclude that this is partly caused by difficulties with data collection.

Like Hodkinson and Taylor (2002) we consider induction as a learning trajectory that can be designed and partly planned. It is striking that participants' suggestions on improving induction mainly referred to the desire to have a more planned and formally arranged induction. Their ideas are consistent with contemporary notions about professional learning in the workplace (e.g. Boyd et al., 2007; Glazer & Hanafin, 2006; Billett, 2004), which stress the necessity of induction embedded in an organizational culture in which learning and working together are part of the everyday working life of all members. Research on induction in closely related areas shows that formal learning opportunities, combined with utilizing informal learning possibilities was found most appropriate for induction purposes. Hodkinson and Taylor examining the induction of UK university lecturers stressed the importance of collaborative training activities for newcomers that allow sharing experiences and concerns. In addition, mentoring and supervision were found to constitute strong formal learning opportunities as well. On the other hand they pointed at more informal learning through team teaching, co-teaching and all kinds of communication with colleagues. Comparable conclusions were reported by Smith and Ingersoll (2004) in their extensive research on induction of teachers.

Mentoring is one of the crucial cornerstones of induction. However, it is not sufficient that mentors provide answers and transmit the routines. Becoming a teacher of teachers presupposes mentors who possess the competencies to stimulate newcomers' participation in various tasks and engagement in reflective learning experiences. Today it is acknowledged that teacher educators' learning should be more geared towards developing an appreciation of the complexity of teaching and learning and teaching about teaching (Loughran & Berry, 2005; Loughran, 2006). Thus sufficient focus on learning, reflection and development as an ongoing process, partly individually, partly collaboratively, is more appropriate than induction that is primarily restricted to transmitting information, habits and routines.



uncertainty. For instance, the word 'intervision' is often used by Dutch teacher educators. Its specific meaning is related to a structured way of reflection in a group of peers. In other countries this term is not known. Does this mean structured peer conversations aimed at reflection do not occur in the other countries or is the term unknown? These observations make clear that we need to continue to build on a shared language in order to communicate in a meaningful way about our experiences, expectations and needs as teacher educators in different countries and different educational systems. Being engaged in cross-national research projects constitutes a strong collaborative learning environment for us, teacher educators. We view this as a point of particular interest that deserves special attention in international communities like ATEE.

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