What are the characteristics of a professional teacher educator? A think piece

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Abstract
This question - 'What are the characteristics of a professional teacher educator?' - was simply sent out as a survey to all teacher educators who engage with the Teacher Education Advancement Network (TEAN). The aim was to give respondents the opportunity to comment from their own perspectives, whatever they were, thus adding their voices to our search for the characteristics of professional teacher educators. The resulting data were collated and refined by the authors of this paper who then worked together to write the think piece. As a think piece it sets out to provoke a response from its readers and hopes that readers will 'think' and use it to share in dialogue with colleagues and continue to add their voices to this debate.

Keywords
Teacher educators; characteristics; professional.

Introduction
At the 9th TEAN (Teacher Education Advancement Network) Conference in 2018, TEAN invited colleagues to consider *the Ambition of Teacher Education*. Our keynote Kay Livingston from the University of Glasgow reminded us that the identity of a teacher educator is complex, and the voice of the teacher educator is often not very loud, and thus, we would add, not often heard. Livingston (2014: 219) suggests 'A better understanding of who takes up the role of teacher educator and the different knowledge, skills and expertise that teacher educators, working in different locations and educational sectors, can offer teachers is needed. Uncovering these often "hidden" or "unrecognised" teacher educators is necessary to value their contribution to teacher education and to give greater attention to their professional learning needs'. In an age of 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2000) and at a time where there is arguably a struggle for the very 'soul of teacher education' (Green, Reid, and Brennan, 2017; Zeichner, 2018), this think piece seeks to ignite debate by projecting voices of teacher educators so they are heard and thereby encouraged to recognise themselves that their "practice is at the heart of teacher education – its soul" (Zeichner, 2017: 41).

These thoughts, coupled with an underlying, persistent murmur from the TEAN community concerning teacher educators as professionals, led to the creation of the theme of the 10th TEAN

Conference 2019 – Celebrating the Inspiration of the Professional Teacher Educator. Within this conference title lie three basic assumptions which may or may not be refuted: a teacher educator is a 'professional' with a distinct 'professional identity'; a teacher educator possesses 'inspiration', used to inspire those learning to teach; the inspiration that the professional teacher educator possesses is worth celebrating. O'Dwyer and Atli (2015) give some endorsement of these assumptions, although the assumption of celebration is perhaps TEAN's alone. In their research for the Turkish Ministry of Education they asked, 'How do teacher educators perceive their role?' They discovered: 'Educators' roles … involve inspiring, creating interest in development and convincing of the rewards, displaying passion and enjoyment, and promoting open communication' (op. cit. :8). They list among their 'desirable personal characteristics': 'professional curiosity; objectivity; and the ability to surmount negative experiences, through perseverance, reflection, discussion with colleagues and the seeking of new ideas' (op.cit. :10). It is interesting to wonder whether 'desirable' implies non-essential, a question which will be considered further.

The survey which forms the basis of this paper was created to give teacher educator colleagues the opportunity to add their voice to our quest to discover which characteristics we think a professional teacher educator has or should have. The potential over-simplification implied by the survey question 'what are the characteristics of the professional teacher educator?' did not deter respondents from reflecting the complexity mentioned above and showed evidence of a desire amongst teacher educators to be far more vociferous about their identity and achievements. This paper which presents a distillation of data from survey respondents is presented as a think piece, in that it sets out the opinions expressed in response to the survey question but goes further by wishing to provoke thoughts in those that read it. In the text below the words used under each subheading are mostly compilations of the words used by respondents, sometimes with accompanying questions and sometimes with supporting references. We hope that you will wish to explore these questions, thinking whether, and how, the roles, qualities and expertise required varies for teacher educators working in different phases and contexts.

Having suggested that what comes next sits upon disputable assumptions, a declaration needs to be made now that responses would seem to indicate that there are no particular assumptions that one can make about professional teacher educators. The question was about teacher educators with no specific type of teacher educator given, no specific location such as school, further education or university stipulated, and no cut-off such as beginning students or those requiring continuing professional development suggested. Not surprisingly many respondents referred to their own circumstances which is quite understandable, but for the purposes of this paper, the specific circumstances have been deleted so that a more inclusive version of 'a teacher educator' can be discussed. Whether we should expect the same characteristics of teacher educators in different contexts is thus not explored here. No categories were given in the survey, but pragmatically some categorisation has been made here in order to theme ideas.

How the survey was done
In June and July 2018 after the 9th TEAN Conference, TEAN sent out a survey to teacher educator colleagues with one question only: 'What are the characteristics of a professional teacher educator?' It was made clear in the accompanying email that the purpose of the survey was to give 'you the opportunity to add your voice to our quest to discover what we think a professional teacher educator is'. Thus it was always intended to be simply a starting place to gather initial thoughts from any responses received. The responses were collated and sorted into broad categories and those respondents who had expressed an interest in following up the survey were sent sections of the responses in order to work to condense the text. Following this, the full condensed version of the responses was sent out again to a small team of volunteers from the respondents with a request for

comments. After receipt of these, a draft version of this think piece was issued with again a request for comments and the final draft which is published here was constructed by the authors.

Findings
The findings expressed here come from the results of the survey and reflect myriad opinions, not necessarily the opinions of all or even one of the authors. Some of the questions prompted by the data are set out in text boxes and serve as starting points for you to add your own. In this think piece, the questions posed are to teacher educators. The intention is that it is the voice of teacher educators in the first instance which should be more strongly heard and thus those voices can act as preparation for other audiences.

Moral purpose
In 2007, The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland published a document – Teaching: The Reflective Profession – which set out clearly the moral purpose of a teacher as a key characteristic: 'The concept of teachers in the service of both the individual and society situates our work within an ethical framework and resonates readily with the notion of moral purpose as a defining feature of professional endeavour' (GTCNI, 2007: 7). With cautious generalisation, the issue of moral purpose also underpinning the work of teacher educators seems to win support in our findings: professional teacher educators possess an ethical, moral duty to nurture values in those learning to teach, to the maximum benefit of all the learners for whom they share responsibility. However here are some of the questions this seeming 'given' provoked:

- Is moral purpose a site of contention?
- Are there particular values that we, as teacher educators, should nurture?
- Who determines the values?
- Do we nurture the student teachers in developing their own set of values?
- Does/should the moral purpose of teacher educators align with the moral purpose of teachers?

These questions suggest that our supposed moral values may well be different between individuals, and anyway, different views are a necessary part of the criticality we may want our students to cultivate. One more question: If, as one respondent suggested, 'a teacher educator is someone who promotes teaching as a values-based profession', whose values are they?

Roles
Discussion concerning what roles teacher educators fulfil in the survey were reminiscent of the work of the professional role of teacher educators by Lunenberg, Dengerink, and Korthagen (2014). Lunenberg et al. (2017: 557) state: 'Teacher educators, however, are not only teachers of teachers, they also fulfil other roles … These roles require specific knowledge'. Literature concerning the roles of teacher educators is replete with lists of requirements, for example, O'Dwyer and Atli (2015: 8) suggest such things as 'assessor, friend … colleague'. The range of roles felt to be carried out by teacher educators according to our survey respondents included: teacher of teachers, gatekeeper, curriculum developer, broker, administrator, researcher, mentor, coach, tutor, sage, critical friend, facilitator, judge. Added to these is also the role of practising teacher or, a somewhat curious distant mutation of a teacher into a 'teacher at arm's length', which expression could possibly be a new way of talking about teacher educators. This resonates with what Murray (2007: 272) has termed teacher educators as 'second order practitioners'. There is also a perceived merging of roles between

counselling skills, teaching skills and coaching skills that teacher educators need to possess. One of the major roles would seem to be an ability to care for one's students, an interesting one as it perhaps assumes no need for self-care or at least does not overtly suggest it. This caring for students would include full regard to their resilience, health and mental wellbeing, and, although the setting of high standards is important, it is necessary to temper this with humane sensitivity rather than in an institutional/tick-box manner. Here are some of the questions that these thoughts on the roles of teacher educators provoked:

- Are all these roles of equal importance or is there a hierarchy of roles?
- Is someone inadequate as a teacher educator if s/he cannot tick all the boxes?
- What roles are missing?
- Is the notion of teacher educators as 'second order practitioners' a useful one?
- Should we assume that the variety and range of this wide array of roles requires that teacher educators possess certain qualities?

Qualities

We will start with the possible assumption that teacher educators are imbued with 'qualities' and that it may be possible to put those qualities on a list agreed, understood and shared by all who consider themselves to be a teacher educator. O'Dwyer and Atil (2015: 10) suggest that teacher educators need a range of desirable personal characteristics, including things 'such as: self-confidence; patience; active listening; thinking on the spot'. In our responses, there was a sense in the initial data collected that there are some kinds of shared belief as to what the qualities of a teacher educator may be, albeit open to subjective interpretation. If such a list were to be devised it may be best to differentiate between essential and desirable, reminiscent of a job description format perhaps. Figure 1 gives you an opportunity to consider some of the qualities suggested. Perhaps 'etc.' is the most significant word in the box.

Figure 1 – Qualities of a professional teacher educator

A professional teacher educator: is a reflective practitioner; is non-judgmental and prepared to examine her/his own bias regularly; should have a sense of humour and a verve for life and learning; should be curious, keen to explore new attitudes, philosophies and approaches and open to new learning; has the ability to stay calm under pressure; is solutions focussed rather than dwelling on negative issues; is flexible; is a good communicator/ negotiator; must be sympathetic, empathic, responsible, organised, an effective manager, a good listener, an excellent classroom practitioner who can model effective practice, a collaborator, a communicator, a critical thinker, passionate, enthusiastic etc; must have determination, tolerance, resilience, empathy, honesty, enthusiasm, passion, optimism and compassion.

Some of the questions prompted by this list:

- Are these professional qualities or personal qualities?
- Are personal qualities irrelevant in a search for the characteristics of a professional teacher educator?
- Which of these qualities are generic to educators and which are distinctive to teacher educators?
- Are some of these qualities essential and some desirable?
- Is 'etc.' significant?
- What qualities are missing?

Expertise

Boyd (2014: 67) discusses the importance of explicit modelling for teacher educators, that is to say stepping out of the teacher education session and explicitly reflecting by 'thinking aloud' about the design and facilitation of the session. Loughran and Berry (2005: 200) affirm the depth of skill required for modelling, 'Laying bare one's own pedagogical thoughts and actions for critique and doing so to help student–teachers "see into practice"— all practice, not just the "good things we do"'. The importance of modelling came through in our findings as the suggestion that teacher educators are people who, as specialists in their field, provide nuanced insights into praxis, both modelling proven strategies for success, and offering clear written and verbal (oral) advice when conducting focussed observations. But this goes further: teacher educators can explain their practice in detail, and help others to find ways to develop their own. This may require a certain vocabulary which may or may not need to be agreed by all. They are able to observe, support, give feedback, and develop others' learning in a perceptive, supportive and thoughtful way. Through modelling teacher educators exemplify excellent pedagogic practices, whatever this might mean.

Teacher educators should be expert in their teaching subject(s) or their field and are able to develop their subject knowledge and pedagogic knowledge in subject specific and holistic ways. In addition, teacher educators are required to be experts in teacher education. Moreover, teacher educators are able to draw on a range of educational knowledge to support students in analysing, theorising and understanding their practice and teacher educators continue to develop their own practice and subject and pedagogical expertise by accessing appropriate professional development.

Teacher educators also possess the expertise to develop and help learners grow as reflective practitioners who understand complex learning situations. They are capable of giving constructive feedback on oral and written assignments, know how people learn, what causes a barrier to students' learning, and have knowledge of strategies to overcome these barriers. This goes on to require that teacher educators employ pedagogic knowledge across all situations in which they may be training teachers. (If indeed they are training teachers, rather than educating, developing, creating teachers or possibly doing something else collectively or individually or in groups.) This pedagogic knowledge may or may not be guided by a pedagogical framework, dependent upon whether such a thing exists or possibly does not … or perhaps may exist but be rejected as inadequate or irrelevant for the teacher educator. As one respondent claims that a teacher educator is someone whose pedagogy is key to her/his identity, this could well be crucial. But interesting as the statement may be, does it imply an inflexibility to explore new pedagogies and result in an existential crisis if the individual's pedagogy is challenged?

Teacher educators do not and should not be people who work alone, even though they need to be able to work independently. This may be helped or hindered by the lack of a set of standards for teacher educators. They need to engage with other teacher educators and other institutions in professional development and support, not least because, in an increasingly challenging environment (and one could be excused for asking when is it not) collaborative practice and professional communities of practice give mutual support and motivation. This too is a duty of teacher educators so that their students are saved from a restricted apprenticeship and lack of knowledge about a range of educational settings. Some questions prompted by the data are:

- Is there / should there be a distinctive pedagogy of teacher education?
- Should we/can we define excellent pedagogic practices?
- If they exist, how do we choose which to exemplify?
- Are pedagogic practices 'generic or distinctive'?
- In what ways can/should teacher educators continue to develop their own practice?
- What is appropriate professional development?
- Is there a moral obligation, or a duty, on teacher educators to save their students from a restricted apprenticeship?

Engaging with policy

Teacher educators could perhaps be seen as translators of policy. Heineke, Ryan and Tocci (2015: 392), in their work to encourage teacher educators to prepare teachers as what they call 'educational policy actors' suggest positive ways forward for students to engage with education policy: 'To begin to shift the negative discourse on teaching and move away from conceptualizing teachers as passive targets for reform efforts, we must prepare future teachers for active and constructive roles in educational policy'. According to the survey responses, teacher educators are people who should have a good understanding of current government policy and new legislation, however it is also suggested that they should have an overview of educational direction, presumably the current government policies. If teacher educators are obligated to engage with professional standards issued by policy makers in order that their students are conversant with them, perhaps they are also obliged to help those students withstand performance-management favoured notions of 'compliance' or 'obedience' or acceptance of imposed 'standards'. Teacher educators attend to a range of purposes of education which go well beyond standards or competences recommended at any given time and context, and engage critically with education policy, literature and research. Teacher educators should be prepared to disrupt and disturb; this should start with a declared intention of this to their students to encourage and allow interrogation of current orthodoxies. An interesting set of questions on this theme:

- Should teacher educators 'help' their students to interrogate and 'go beyond' policy?
- Is a teacher educator someone who can be an island unto her/himself, ignoring the government policy of the day and of the country?
- Should teacher educators have a knowledge of the historic context of education so that there is some understanding of the bigger picture?

Engaging with research, theory and criticality

It appears that there is a lot of support for the notion of teacher educators being someone showing a determination to adopt a critical and reflective stance towards their own professional identity as a teacher educator. They embed research and scholarship in all they do, have a detailed understanding of theory and how it translates into practice and vice versa, are up to date on research and scholarship in the field. They are research active and able to generate this disposition in their students. This leads to an active role in sharing outcomes with colleagues in journal articles and conferences.

Research initiatives have been seen to strengthen student teacher education through research partnerships (Douglas, 2015; Kotsopoulos et al., 2012; Lambe, 2011; Price, 2001). Possibilities for student teachers, teachers and teacher educators to work together in a research process that is integral to student teacher education have the aim of ensuring that critical enquiry and learning are kept at the forefront of the work. A research approach may help to counter the lack of tension and challenge identified in research between teachers and teacher educators who may too readily accommodate different perspectives and restrict discussions to practical rather than pedagogical issues. 'Such a process is likely to feel comfortable for the participants but does not fully explore the opportunities offered by dissonant perspectives' (Hutchinson, 2011: 189). Wanting to minimise possible threats to pedagogical understandings, these are rarely discussed and instead, the focus is on teaching performance: 'we now need to find ways to make these tensions the subject of discussion and debate, considering the wider context of cultural, institutional and historical situations within which these activities are mediated' (Spendlove et al., 2010: 75). Promoting challenge and debate in

student teacher education can benefit understanding of pedagogical issues for student teachers, teachers and teacher educators (Douglas, 2014).

Self-study (or S-STEP) is seen to be very popular amongst some international teacher educators, where teacher educators are broadening and strengthening their own professional practice, but also with an aim to support others. Vanassche and Kelchtermans' (2015: 512) literature search of 'The state of the art in Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices' defines self-study as a research approach which 'focuses on one's own practice as a teacher educator … it privileges the use of qualitative research methods … [relies on] collaborative interactions … [bases its validation on trustworthiness]'. Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015: 523) see it as '… an approach into a research perspective that is more promising and inspiring than the currently dominant perspectives'. This links to the BERA – RSA's (British Education Research Association - Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce) enquiry (BERA, 2014: 4) into the role of research in teacher education which concluded that 'there is also strong evidence that teachers and teacher educators need to be equipped to engage in enquiry-oriented practice, which means having the capacity, motivation and opportunity to use research-related skills to investigate what is working well and what isn't fully effective in their own practice'. An open list of questions for this theme, i.e. inviting more:

- Why should teacher educators embed research and scholarship in all they do?
- Is the embedding of research essential or desirable? Why?
- How can there be time for teacher educators to pursue an active role with regard to research output?
- Why is critical enquiry important for teachers? Is it important?

Concluding thoughts
What we have here is a plethora of thoughts, tamed to some degree but most certainly not pinned down. However that was not the intention. The intention of the think piece is to provoke thinking to continue this fascinating conversation. The concluding thoughts will continue in that vein.

You may not be surprised to read that the links between the characteristics of teacher educators and teachers were very apparent in the responses to the survey and showed a fair amount of overlap. This probably prompts questions about differences between the two roles.

- Do teachers and teacher educators have the same 'mission', the same underlying moral purpose?
- Is a teacher educator simply and fundamentally a teacher with a few added characteristics and responsibilities?
- Do these few added characteristics create the complexity of the role?

The raw data that this think piece draws on are very complex with respondents noticeably repeating the same ideas which are of importance to them over and over, and anxious to provide every characteristic which they then claim as essential, although there is also the point made above that there should be some division between essential and desirable. Are there other, preferable headings which would serve to cluster the characteristics? For example: teacher educator as learner, teacher educator as teacher, teacher educator as teacher educator, teacher educator as researcher / scholar. Furthermore, the skills / knowledge and understandings would seem to fall into areas such as

personal qualities, partnership and collaboration, knowledge (subject and pedagogical), wellbeing (pastoral). One may be left with the question of whether it is possible to produce a definition of a teacher educator that would suit all. However, to end on a note of collapse before a contentious task would be counterproductive and a betrayal of the professional qualities of such an important group of educationalists. Philpott (2014: 14) writing in 2014 states: 'The nature of teacher education and the role of teacher educators is in need of research and debate at a time when learning to teach can take place in a wide variety of contexts and when teaching about teaching is increasingly undertaken by different types of practitioners.' We would maintain that discussion and constant variation are valid, but a shared definition of characteristics would lend conviction to teacher educators' feeling of self-worth, strengthening their voice to claim recognition as a serious and unique professional group.

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