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Developing a research profile: mentoring and support for teacher educators

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the professional and academic development of teacher educators in relation to research. It draws on findings from a small-scale, comparative study of teacher educators in two higher education institutions in the south of England. There is a growing need for teacher educators in the UK to develop research skills (Harrison & McKeon 2008), because of the emphasis on research assessment in higher education (HE) and increasing expectations on all university lecturers to have an active research profile. In addition, most postgraduate initial teacher education is now accredited at master's level and often involves some small scale research, therefore teacher educators need to ensure that they possess the appropriate research as well as teaching skills.

Within this context, the growing need for teacher educators to develop research identities is discussed in relation to mentoring and support in two universities (one new, the other well established). Key contextual features of each university are highlighted and the perspectives of the teacher educators and research mentors are analysed within a situated learning framework (Lave & Wenger 1991). Positive aspects of individual and collective mentoring practices and other forms of research support are identified, as well as barriers to research activity arising from teacher educators' professional and academic roles.

Teacher educators: transition from school to university

A growing body of research on the development of teacher educators has highlighted the difficulties and tensions experienced by teacher educators who make the transition from school teaching into academic life, especially in the area of research, and the need for effective induction procedures into higher education . For example, Dinkelman et al. (2006), studying the transition of teacher educators into higher education in the USA,

emphasise the shifts in academic and professional identity that new teacher educators undergo and the importance of institutional context in this process. Maguire (2000), in a study in the UK, stresses the difficulty of teacher educators performing some traditionally academic roles, such as research, because of their school background, with resulting differential status.

Harrison and McKeon (2008), also in the UK, argue that teacher educators face numerous challenges in making the complex transition into new academic roles; they can therefore lack confidence and often still see themselves as teachers. Similarly, Murray (2008) stresses that teacher educators are characterised by a strong sense of commitment to students, with teaching as their ‘anchor of professional identity’ (2008:119), low self confidence in relation to academic roles and varying attitudes to research. Murray (2008) found that induction into research was particularly weak, with few opportunities to work alongside experienced researchers in a ‘collaborative learning environment’ (2008:126). Likewise, Harrison and McKeon (2008) found that the induction of teacher educators was often patchy and inappropriate, with generally poor mentoring and inadequate structured support. Peer support was valued but often arose by chance, so learning opportunities were missed.

International studies have identified the importance of activities such as teacher educators’ development portfolios (Koster et al 2008) reflective inquiry and self-study groups (Kitchen et al 2008). For instance, McGee and Lawrence (2009), analysing an in-service project for teacher educators in New Zealand, highlight the value of using evidence-based reflection and working collaboratively. Similarly, Ritter (2009) from the USA stresses the importance of qualitative self-study to help build a teacher educator identity, together with close interaction and collaboration with peers. In a study of teacher educators in the Netherlands, Timmerman (2009) emphasises the long-term process of developing a professional identity and the value of role models as a key factor. Like the UK studies, these have stressed the value of within-team development and support practices, rather than outside mentoring and support, although these projects are generally focusing on teacher educators improving their professional or subject pedagogy, rather

than on developing research identities. On a wider scale, the importance of personal and professional biographies in the shaping of academic identities is also emphasised by some researchers (Keltchtermans 2003, Skerrett 2008). However, the research development of teacher educators is as yet an under-researched area; our study starts to address this gap.

Methodology and theoretical framework

A case study approach was used to conduct this exploratory study (Cohen et al 2007), with the larger cases being the two universities and within these, case study teacher educators and research mentors. Purposive sampling (ibid) was used to identify six teacher educators (five women, one man; three from each university) who represented a range of ages and gender, as well as experience in schools, higher education and research, roles and responsibilities. The common factor was that they were all from a school teaching background before they came into HE. Six research mentors (four women, two men; three from each university), covering a similar range, were also interviewed, making a total of 12 interviews altogether. We have used the generic term ‘mentor’ to describe a range of roles covered by supervisors on taught master’s and doctoral programmes, as well as those who undertook specific research support roles, known as research mentors at the ‘old’ university and research co-ordinators at the ‘new’ university.

The teacher educators and mentors were interviewed in order to map personal biographies and experiences of transition, and identify effective mentoring practices and other forms of support, as well as any barriers or problems encountered in developing a research profile. All interviewees gave their informed consent, and confidentiality was assured. The three interviewers used an agreed, semi-structured schedule for the interviews, which lasted from thirty to forty five minutes each and usually took place in the interviewee’s office. With permission from the interviewees, the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed before analysis. Respondent validation (Cohen et al 2007)) was used by sending the interview transcripts to the interviewees to enable them to check for accuracy and add any further comments if they wanted. In writing up the findings, all names and some personal details have been removed to protect anonymity.

An innovative aspect of the methodological approach is that beginning researchers from the teacher education faculty in both universities helped an experienced researcher to undertake the interviewing and co-author the article. This approach is a variation on Stenhouse's (1975) model of the teacher researcher, with teachers (in this case teacher educators) working alongside researchers in order to enhance the understanding of both and enrich research project findings. Both teacher educator interviewers were scrupulous about not commenting on the teacher educators' responses during the interviews, in order to avoid undue influence, but found it 'difficult not to jump in' (teacher educator interviewer, new university) and agree with the many of their peers' views and concerns. They also noticed that their colleagues were rather nervous being interviewed by them, even though they worked with them every day. On both sides, this probably indicated some lack of confidence, but was useful in minimising interviewer bias. When interviewing research mentors, they found it easier to be more interactive and follow up certain points as they arose, as appropriate, while keeping to the interview schedule.

Narrative analysis (Clandinin & Connelly 2000) is used to examine the teacher educators' and mentors' accounts, including relationships and types of support, major problems and challenges and the development of research identities. It is argued that a biographical approach is particularly suitable for investigating individual experience and highlighting new insights into transition processes. For this reason we explored in some depth what all the interviewees had done before entering HE, their transition into the university context and early research experiences.

The study findings are analysed within a situated learning framework (Lave & Wenger 1991), in recognition that the specific context in which teacher educators work is of vital importance in the process of learning. Teacher educators are engaged in a constant process of negotiation and interaction between academic and pedagogical demands and mediate their experiences through membership of one or more communities of practice (Wenger 1998). It will be argued that Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation is particularly useful when considering the transition of teacher

educators from a school-focused workplace to a higher education context. However, other researchers in this field (Murray 2008, Harrison & McKeon 2008) have argued that this framework is insufficient to explain the complex processes at work. To supplement this, we have found Eraut's (20004) research on informal learning in the workplace valuable in helping to identify key factors affecting successful transitions.

Background context: the two universities and participants

The research was carried out in a well-established pre-1992 university and a newly established post-1992 university; (a number of new universities were created in England and Wales after 1992 from former polytechnics and colleges of higher education). The older university is research intensive, with students in science, arts, humanities and social science subjects. The new university is a former teacher training college; students across several campuses focus on public sector provision (business, education, health, social care) as well as courses in arts, humanities and social sciences. Both universities were in the process of reorganisation at the time of the research.

The older university had a single department of education within a larger faculty, while the new university had several departments of education within a faculty of education, including a department for research. In terms of teacher education, the older university offered the postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE: a one-year teacher training course for those with first degrees) and employment-based routes (around 250 students), but no undergraduate teacher education, whilst the new university offered a large range of undergraduate, postgraduate and employment-based initial teacher education programmes (around 2,500 students). Both universities had successful results in education in the recent research assessment exercise (RAE: the quality profiling of submissions by UK universities in order to determine research grants), but the older university had a higher amount of world class educational research, and the number of people entered in education represented two thirds of the department, as opposed to only 6% of the faculty of education in the new university.

The teacher educators and research mentors who took part in the research had very similar profiles across both universities. As found in other studies (Murray 2008, Harrison & McKeon 2008), the teacher educators were mostly highly experienced teachers who had held positions of responsibility in schools such as head of department, subject or year leader and deputy head. The research mentors also had considerable previous teaching experience, including a former head teacher, deputy head, advisory teacher and head of department. The teacher educators had spent an average of five years in higher education, ranging from one to seven years, while the research mentors had been in higher education for an average of 15 years, ranging from eight to 23 years; many of these had worked in several universities. The latter included two professors, a Reader and three senior or principal lecturers (the terms are different at pre- and post-1992 universities). The teacher educators included two senior or principal lecturers.

In terms of current roles, the teacher educators not only taught extensively on a range of teacher education programmes, but were also convenors of programmes or subject leaders. Two were taking master's programmes while the other four already had master's degrees; of these, three were studying for doctorates. The research mentors also had multiple roles and responsibilities, but in more research-focused contexts: most taught on master's and doctoral programmes and held positions including doctoral programme convenor and director of research, as well as research co-ordinator/mentor roles, although two of the new university mentors also taught on teacher education programmes. These mentoring roles were responded to in different ways by the teacher educators, as we shall see.

Provision of research support in education was extensive in both universities. Both held regular research seminars, departmentally or through research centres. Research groups and mentors/co-ordinators read papers and gave feedback on ideas for bids, conference papers and publications. Both universities also provided support for research bids in terms of financial costing. However, as we shall demonstrate, the take up of this support and responses to it varied, and there was some difference between the perspectives of research mentors and teacher educators.

Research and teacher education: different cultures?

In both universities, there was a perceived division between teacher education and research, which was felt by both teacher educators and mentors, but it was more marked in the older university. As one mentor there said, 'I'm sure that it's easy to feel outside the research world in teacher education.' There were certainly many examples in the teacher educators' accounts of feeling cut off from research. For instance, one teacher educator (old university) explained,

There's a sort of separation between the people that are involved in the research and it's the main part of what they do, and us that have teaching as their main responsibility...so it's not always easy to see yourself as any kind of researcher.

She made an important connection between the type of work that people did and their professional identity. Another teacher educator described feeling 'quite excluded' from research and thought that researchers' perceptions of teacher education were sometimes misconstrued; this was confirmed by mentors too. As one said,

I feel that there are some people who don't understand...the nature and role of the work (of teacher education). Different roles of work involved in terms of demands and what can be expected.

This lack of understanding was more evident in the older university where research was a priority and an expectation; mentors stressed that this included senior managers, as well as people within the department who had come through a research career trajectory rather than from a teaching background. 'There's a historical, structural issue that's huge, that some people teach and some people do research,' as another mentor put it. Eraut (2004) stresses the effect of employers' demands and expectations on employees' confidence and ability to perform well, especially if these are unduly high or inappropriate.

In the new university, a similar division was expressed with a slightly different emphasis, which revolved around bids for research funding. One teacher educator said, 'There's a way of certain people getting them (bids) and others don't.' Her perception was that most funding was obtained by people who worked in the research department and this was confirmed by one of the mentors, who stressed the geographical separation as well as separation of expertise: 'There's not the expertise within my department about writing research bids and the bids are not being written round you'. However, he and others stressed that the supportive culture of the university was an asset. As in the older university, another new university mentor stressed that identities and expectations with regards to research came from the history of the institution: 'Our history is as a teacher training college and that's embedded. If they are thinking of being a university then research would be higher up on the agenda.' This was reflected in a teacher educator's comment, 'I'm not sure whether the research is really valued.'

We did not explore the interviewees' definitions of research directly, but some interesting distinctions came from the interviews, with similarities across both universities, about different types of research and their perceived status and value. For example, one teacher educator (old university) stressed that teacher educators were regularly engaged in two kinds of research for teaching purposes: firstly, scholarship around synthesising others' research, and secondly, informal 'fly on the wall' research whilst doing school visits. She distinguished between this and what she called 'hard research', where researchers were 'going out into the field' and collecting data with the purpose of publication. As well as researching for different purposes, there was a status difference implicit in her comments, and a further distinction, also highlighted by some mentors at both universities between practitioner research and other forms of 'hard' research. For instance, one mentor (new university) said, 'I think reflective practitioner research is fine, but you can't live on that in a university, you've got to have a bit more than that.' Another mentor (old university) commented, 'There's a lack of valuing about people who just research their own practice.' It is interesting to contrast this 'lack of valuing' of practitioner researcher with Stenhouse's (1975) view that this approach is a strong and important basis for research into education.

The universities' historical philosophies and departmental cultures were clearly a key influence on expectations (cf. Eraut 2004, Lave & Wenger 1991) and consequently on research identities and priorities, as we shall also see when we look in more detail at barriers to research. Whereas in the older university, research was perceived as the main priority, in the new university teaching was still seen as having a higher priority and value, and in both there was some separation between the activities. We have also seen that practitioner research could be seen as having a lower value in both universities. With these difficulties and tensions already in mind, let us look next at the expertise that teacher educators brought to their work and potentially to research.

Strengths and skills of teacher educators

A range of skills and strengths that teacher educators could bring to research were identified by both teacher educators and mentors, and were very similar across both universities. Up to date knowledge of children, schools and classrooms was the most frequently cited strength - 'first hand experience of working with children' (teacher educator, new university) - as well as subject knowledge expertise, as found in other studies (Dinkelman et al. 2006, Murray 2008). Being 'passionate' about their subject was mentioned by teacher educators in each university as a particular strength. Expertise in teaching and subject pedagogy were widely cited as one of the main reasons that teachers were appointed to teacher education posts: as a mentor in the new university explained: 'They have the subject knowledge...in relation to practice, that's why they're on teacher education.'

Teacher educators themselves cited the fact that they were constantly researching in order to inform their teaching, as we saw earlier. A teacher educator (new university) stressed that,

As teachers we're very reflective and evaluative about ourselves, about what we're doing and about initiatives that come in. Reading starts to feed into your practice and into what we tell the students.

However, the strengths that were cited in relation to teacher education were not always seen by mentors as potential research assets; indeed, they were sometimes seen as a disadvantage. For example, one mentor (new university) said, 'The discourse is all about teaching,' while another argued, 'They're not used to justifying through academic theory... in a way government literature has for some people superceded academic literature.' In contrast, two research mentors at the older university articulated very clearly what relevance this kind of expertise had for research. As one of them said: 'They bring very important knowledge about teachers and students which are critical to research in education, especially research on teaching and learning'. She felt that teacher educators were more in touch with the 'burning questions' (similar to Stenhouse's (1975) characterisation of teachers' research questions), and brought a useful dual standpoint, 'as they have both insider knowledge and perspective and also the outsider perspective.' Another mentor (old university) cited teacher educators' ability to interpret data because of their classroom experience:

People with teacher education expertise have a greater depth of understanding than people who've just been through a research career of what the evidence means, the classroom observation.

She cited several examples of research projects which had benefited from teacher educator involvement and been enriched by this depth of interpretation (as in Stenhouse 1975).

A further key strength identified by mentors and teacher educators in both universities was teacher educators' access to schools and 'sensitivity to the context', as one mentor put it, while lack of ready access was perceived as a possible problem to researchers. One teacher educator (old university) stressed that the 'trust and confidence... make them (schools) very ready and willing to help me with the research.' She emphasised teacher educators' experience of partnership with the community, which she felt was not valued

highly enough by the (old) university, in contrast to those at the new university, where partnership and community links were central to the university's core mission.

The picture that emerges from the positive viewpoints expressed is of teacher educators being experienced and confident in school contexts and being able to draw insights gained from this together in research in a valuable way. However, this question elicited some very mixed responses, as we have seen; strengths in teaching and scholarship were sometimes portrayed as positive disadvantages in research. Possible reasons for this can be found in the barriers to research that we will explore fully in the next section.

Challenges and barriers to research

It is important to stress that teacher educators who have taught in schools go through a dual transition (Dinkelman et al. 2006): firstly, from school to higher education, and secondly, within HE, from teacher to researcher. This is a complex, challenging process, therefore it is hardly surprising that engaging with research can be problematic. The teacher educators from both universities talked with feeling about how hard it was for them initially moving into a university culture, as other researchers have found (Maguire 2000, Ritter 2009). Although working with trainee teachers was in some ways the easiest part of the work cited, they did have to adapt to teaching adults rather than children. However, by far the most commonly mentioned problem on entering HE was the lack of clear structure and organisation compared to schools. As one teacher educator from the new university expressed it, 'You're suddenly flung into an institution with thousands of people...that's quite challenging.'

Teacher educators, often with huge expertise and senior positions in schools, found themselves in a new environment which challenged their sense of identity and often left them feeling deskilled. As another teacher educator (old university) commented, 'There's sometimes an assumption that in practice teacher educators we are academics, and I didn't see myself in this way at all when I came to work at the university.' Many of those interviewed were still at this initial stage of peripheral participation in the HE culture

(Lave & Wenger 1991). With such challenges in mind, we will turn to the major barriers to research experienced by teacher educators.

Unanimously the main barrier to research cited by both teacher educators and research mentors was time, or rather lack of time: 'a massive issue,' as one teacher educator put it. Teacher educators have highly intensive teaching timetables and there is very little time left over for research. This was particularly evident at the new university with its large number of teacher education programmes. As one mentor there explained,

There's a desperation for people to do the teaching...that's the emphasis...I suspect that a lot of people have the desire to do research...but they find when they get here there's a huge teaching load.

Another mentor said, 'Tutors are ground down by this (teaching) and very quickly lose their ambitions.' This was confirmed by the teacher educators themselves. For instance, one said, 'There's just no time for the research and that's very frustrating.'

At both universities, teacher educators theoretically had a minimum of half a day a week's research time, but in practice this tended to disappear. Apart from the intensity of the teaching load itself, teacher education programmes follow a school rather than a university year, therefore there is less time overall for research; regular validation and inspections by government agencies are an added pressure. In addition, the teacher educators saw teaching as the central and most important part of their work, therefore this tended to be put first, particularly the student teachers' needs. As one teacher educator (old university) put it,

If you get involved with trainees, the main part of the job, things come up and that's not accounted for in your workload calculations. And some of the problems that trainees have take a lot of time to unravel.

Commitment to the students and their needs came through strongly as a high priority (as in Harrison & McKeon 2008), which almost always took precedence over research time and created tensions and conflicts. One mentor (old university) recognised this when she said, ‘The more committed people are in teacher education, the harder they find it to give to their research.’

A further constraint on time for (usually) female teacher educators was their family responsibilities, which could restrict access to research events (often in the evenings at both universities), as well as additional time on research. The combination of heavy work and family responsibilities was seen as more than enough. As one teacher educator (new university) said, ‘If there’s an event here from 6 to 8 I really wanted to go to, but that is not my life...family commitments come first.’ Although one (male) mentor thought that evenings were a good time to hold research seminars, a (female) mentor (old university) spoke with feeling about the ‘serious pressure’ that any additional inroads into personal time would put on people with families and stressed the importance of work life balance. Gender issues in teacher educators’ experiences are also cited by Murray (2008).

Another aspect of time was the lack of sustained time that would enable people to complete substantial pieces of research. One teacher educator (old university) described the problem clearly: ‘I try to keep days aside which are just for research but in practice that’s very difficult...I find it very frustrating.’ A mentor at the same university characterised the issue as a qualitative difference between teacher education and research, thereby demanding a different quality of time:

Having time to do research involves thinking in quiet places rather than rushing around doing things – it’s hard to find the time and hard to find the right kind of time.

Another teacher educator confirmed the need for ‘a clear stretch...the luxury of whole days or weeks, not having to respond to the next demand.’ There was some sense in her use of the word ‘luxury’ that this would not be proper work, perhaps reflecting some

implicit guilt at the prospect; the strong work ethic in teacher education was stressed by teacher educators and mentors at both universities. A teacher educator at the new university with heavy responsibilities said similarly, 'If I could have two months where I wasn't...then by hook or by hook I would do it, as that would be my day job, an entitlement.' She and other teacher educators were rather critical about the fact that only experienced researchers or those completing doctorates were entitled to study leave. This was another way in which teacher educators at both universities characterised their perceived lower status (as in Maguire 2000) and lack of promotional opportunities.

However, as well as external blame, several of the teacher educators at both universities blamed themselves for not being able to find the quality time for research. For example, one (old university) said, 'I've always been bad at doing that,' while another (new university) said, 'I will block out time then it will get eaten away...In some ways it's my own fault.' These and other teacher educators felt the need for external research support, or working with others on collaborative projects, to enable them legitimately to focus on research activities. 'Even if you had the time, I still think you need that support,' said one (new university). This was also confirmed by the teacher educators who carried out the interviews: having to do the research with others enabled them to prioritise research in a way that they had not been able to do alone.

The self-blame and need for an external 'nudge', as another teacher educator put it, indicated lack of self-confidence among the teacher educators, and lack of a research identity. As one mentor (old university) said, 'Lack of confidence is a huge barrier and a huge challenge.' This was confirmed by teacher educators themselves; for example, one (old university) said, 'I'm not very confident in this (researcher) role and I haven't found it at all easy to do academic writing,' while another said, 'I always felt that my research esteem was really low'. Eraut (2004) stresses that low self confidence can result from insufficient induction and support, coupled with excessive demands.

When considering the barriers and challenges to teacher educators developing a research identity, the issues raised were almost identical across the two universities, although with

some differences of degree within the two contexts. Lack of time was the most frequently raised constraint, but as we have seen, this had several underlying factors, including intensive teaching loads, commitment to students' welfare, in some cases family commitments, lack of quality time, low self-confidence and the need for support. It is to this last aspect that we now turn our attention in more detail.

Role models and other positive support

Teacher educators mentioned a range of ways in which they either received or needed research support. For those undertaking master's or doctoral studies, the formal research training that this provided was highly valued, particularly the role of the supervisor. For example, a teacher educator completing a master's degree (old university) praised the advice and guidance she received:

I have a very supportive supervisor who is very open and helpful. We meet regularly for hour long tutorials and I can email her in between with drafts and she gets back to me very promptly with advice and suggestions.

She found this structured support more useful than the advice given by her research mentor, whom she met less frequently. A teacher educator undertaking a professional doctorate (new university) also valued the 'good written and face to face feedback' she received from her tutor and the confidence that this engendered: 'He made me believe I could do it.' Others cited the enthusiasm for research which their supervisors encouraged. However, another teacher educator (new university) found the support on a taught programme 'sporadic', with long delays before work was returned, so there was some variation.

Research mentors' accounts of supervision processes confirmed the need for regular meetings and feedback, advice about reading and close reading of drafts. For instance, a mentor who was a master's supervisor (new university) emphasised the importance of trust in the supervisor-supervisee relationship, the setting of clear expectations and need to 'keep the pace up...as it's very easy for master's researchers to be lost if you don't

keep the momentum.’ Overall, the formal supervisory support was highly valued by beginning researchers, as it provided them with some research training and structured inputs. As a mentor and doctoral supervisor (new university) commented, it is ‘a kind of induction or immersion into that world...an introduction to research.’ Research seminars and the peer learning that was taking place within the master’s and doctoral programmes through online discussion forums were also found helpful. Opportunities for peer support were better structured at both universities than in Harrison & McKeon’s study (2008).

Support from research mentors and co-ordinators outside the supervisor role was more highly valued by more experienced researchers among the teacher educators, who had begun to build confidence in their research and enjoyed discussing research plans and ‘being challenged,’ as one put it. Meetings with research mentors tended to be less frequent and less structured than meetings with supervisors, although an experienced research mentor (old university) described using a highly structured process, including an update of research plans, together with focused advice on conference papers, draft journal articles or research bids. Another mentor (new university), who was the departmental research co-ordinator, described advising teacher educators on ‘managing their diaries,’ emphasising the need to ‘put research time down and you have to stick to it’. He regarded it as important to work collaboratively: ‘it’s working alongside your colleagues – that has got to be the crucial thing.’ In this way he hoped to be seen as a positive role model. The importance of role models for teacher educators’ development is emphasised in Timmerman (2009).

Collaborative working on research was cited by teacher educators and research mentors alike as the most powerful research support (as in Stenhouse 1975). For example, a teacher educator (old university) described the process of working alongside an experienced researcher on some research which they co-presented at a conference:

Working with L on the conference paper was brilliant...I suppose she was modelling and team working and that enabled me to do it myself. Someone who’s

really inexperienced working with an experienced person, I probably learnt more than anything else.

Further examples were given by other teacher educators and research mentors who had been similarly inspired when starting research. For instance, a research mentor (old university) described working on a book with experienced researchers in her first university post as a teacher educator as ‘the most amazing piece of support I’d ever had.’

The strength of these descriptions indicated the impact that these experiences had made: these were critical moments in teacher educators’ journeys towards becoming researchers. Working alongside experienced colleagues is cited as a major way of professional learning in the workplace (Eraut 2004, Lave & Wenger 1991). With such vivid memories in mind, and the other positive aspects of support already mentioned, we turn to the next stage, where teacher educators were gradually becoming researchers.

Building a research identity

Few of the teacher educators we interviewed felt that they had become confident researchers, although most were aware that they were at a particular stage in the process. Teacher educators’ accounts stressed that there were different needs depending on the stage they had reached. For example, a teacher educator (new university) felt that the move to a researcher identity was a major barrier:

For me, it’s actually to see myself as a researcher, as an academic, cos I still see myself so much as a teacher. And if you get over that hurdle it might get easier to say, ‘I can’t go to that meeting’ or ‘I can’t see that student.’

She felt that she was still ‘muddling along really,’ although her ideas for doctoral research, based around her subject specialism and the impact of national strategies, were very clear and well articulated, based on her experience as a teacher and teacher educator. This supported the research mentor’s views, mentioned earlier, that teacher educators know how to ask the right questions and bring dual perspectives to their research.

For most teacher educators, getting a master's degree or giving a conference paper were the first landmarks, with publication in a journal the next milestone. The latter was a 'big step, a very big step,' as a teacher educator (new university) put it; although she realised that a research mentor might say she was 'that close.' Another teacher educator (old university) described the process as 'a bit like detective work, you get these aha moments. That's very rewarding really.' Inherent satisfaction and reward from research, rather than external praise and feedback, was certainly an indication of moving towards a research identity.

Research mentors confirmed that becoming a researcher involved moving from a state of dependency on supervisors and mentors to greater autonomy. For instance, a mentor (new university) said, 'They want someone to lead and take charge and give them advice and support...They should be taking control.' A different mentor from the same university described the achievement of control and independence as particularly rewarding for the mentor:

The most exciting thing...is when the person realises that it's theirs and they get to do the learning and when they take initiative. And when...they get to that stage , that's when I have my celebration.

Another mentor (old university) described the 'extreme pride' she felt when a research mentee had something published something as akin to 'some parenting experience.'

The research mentors stressed that particular characteristics were needed in order to become a researcher: motivation, passion, determination and even 'being ruthless' were all mentioned. They characterised becoming a researcher as hard, challenging work - 'I had no idea how hard until I tried to do it myself,' as one said - which moved people out of their comfort zone. For instance, a mentor (new university) gave a stirring description of the process:

Being able to step outside yourselves and your subject and researching to challenge what you do, rather than to validate what they do and think...Research is the bit that pulls the rug from under them. I know it did for me, changed my thinking totally. It opens doors...It's about empowering.

This description seemed a very personal one and the mentor explicitly linked it to her own personal journey. Indeed, most of the research mentors felt that they were still learning and developing their research, although the way they talked indicated far greater expertise and confidence about research than the teacher educators, as we might expect. For some mentors, the ultimate reward might be to reach the position of Reader or professor, although this was seen as hard in both universities; for others, the intrinsic reward of doing research and supporting others seemed enough.

What comes through the accounts of both teacher educators and mentors is that becoming a researcher is not an overnight process; it involves an often slow journey, with many stages on a continuum. As we have seen, support from peers, supervisors and colleagues is crucially important in building confidence and expertise, as Eraut's (2004) work on informal learning has shown.

Recommendations for universities

The teacher educators and mentors made numerous suggestions about how things could be improved in their respective universities in relation to research support for teacher educators. These included the need for better communication about research opportunities, information about journals, introduction of statutory study leave and changes in promotions criteria.

Several teacher educators mentioned the importance of structured induction, so that research was put on the agenda from the outset. For example, one (old university) explained:

There's a lot of assumption that when people come to work at the university they will almost learn by osmosis how to work in a very different way. And I think there needs to be a tighter process of induction, not just into the job but how to be a researcher and what it means.

The comment about learning 'by osmosis' indicates that a process of immersion is not enough and that learning new skills needs structured input. This is confirmed in other studies (e.g. Harrison & McKeon 2008, Murray 2008) where the need for appropriate induction into research for teacher educators is also stressed.

Following from induction, many teacher educators thought that 'dedicated' research time should be timetabled, because this would help them preserve research time and 'give them permission' to do it. A (new university) teacher educator suggested faculty research days, in addition to the scholarship days which already existed: 'This is time for you to do your research. I don't see any evidence of that.' Although teacher educators at both universities already had, in theory at least, an entitlement to research time, teacher educators felt that this was not ensured or protected in practice. At the new university in particular, some teacher educators and mentors expressed the view that the rhetoric around research had not yet been transferred into reality. The issue was the reverse at the old university, which 'has always been very research oriented...and that's seen as the most important thing and the highest occupation,' as one teacher educator explained; however, as a teacher educator, she felt excluded from this. As another teacher educator (old university) said, 'It's that sense to be made to feel a poor relation.' Lack of value and status was a recurrent theme, as in Maguire (2000), particularly among teacher educators in the old university.

As well as individual research time, teacher educators made several suggestions around the idea of peer support and research 'buddying' (as in Kitchen et al. 2008, McGee & Lawrence 2009). One teacher educator (new university) emphasised the peer support which already existed in her department in relation to 'finding avenues for research,' while another (new university) described her idea for peer research groups which could

meet regularly and ‘report back at the faculty conference... a bit of stick and a bit of carrot.’ This was especially relevant to the new university where there were several campuses, which excluded some people from attending research seminars, usually held on the main campus. The idea of having to be accountable for research time and report back on it was also mentioned by two mentors at the new university; all three used the carrot and stick image, perhaps because the new university had historically been more target driven.

From the research mentors’ point of view, many recommendations also sprang from the particular ethos of the universities. For example, at the new university, a mentor recommended that the balance between teaching and research be reviewed:

Constantly we hear that teaching is the priority, cos again that’s this history (of the university)...If research is raised on the agenda, there would have to be a better balance, and we would be able to adjust teaching to enable a research culture to flourish.

She also went on to stress that the research ambitions of teacher educators needed to be raised: ‘I’m not sure that we nurture this notion of aspirations.’ From a different perspective, a mentor at the old university similarly recommended that, ‘Institutionally, we’ve got to find time to raise expectations and find ways to learn and value outputs that aren’t the most prestigious to start with.’ Another mentor (old university) recommended reducing the teaching load on teacher education programmes to create more time for research.

A particularly interesting model for change was put forward by one of the mentors (old university) who talked about the way that teacher education was structured in a university in the USA: ‘They always had a research professor in education and paid for a practitioner to co-teach with.’ In this way, research and teaching activities were integrated and this also helped to release some of the teacher educators’ time. The innovative aspect of this model was the integration of research into teacher education, so

that it was embedded in practice. The research professor worked with teacher educators and practitioners on collaborative research projects, rather like an extended Stenhouse (1975) model. This was close to a recommendation made by one of the new university mentors, who thought that each department should have a professor or Reader working alongside teacher educators. We have already seen that this collaborative model could be very effective and have a powerful impact on those who experienced it, similar to newcomers working with experienced colleagues and learning from them (in Lave & Wenger 1991, Eraut 2004).

Looking at the recommendations overall, most would involve a change of culture in the university, led from the top, in order to set clear expectations of, and value for, all academics' work, which would then impact on people's sense of identity and self worth (as stressed by Eraut 2004).

Conclusions

This study has been highly enlightening about the attitudes and research experiences of teacher educators and research mentors working in two universities. Although the historical cultures of the two institutions are very different, the patterns of transition into HE for teacher educators and into a researcher's role have emerged as remarkably similar, with the same major challenges and problems. At the heart of these lies a tension between the kinds of work involved in teacher education and research, in the time that each needs and the skills required. It is to the teacher educators' credit that they were undertaking so much research, given the constraints within which they were working and their generally low confidence in this area.

From their accounts, the teacher educators achieved best when they received structured support, through supervision and research mentoring, appropriate for the stage that they had reached. However, they were most enthusiastic about being engaged in collaborative work with experienced researchers, who could then model processes in real research contexts. The research mentors found these activities rewarding too. Stenhouse's (1975) model of the practitioner and researcher working together has been useful here, and the

findings have also paralleled those of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Eraut (2004) in relation to working with and learning from more experienced colleagues.

Cultural differences between the two universities in terms of research expectations did give rise to some significant differences in the extent to which teacher educators felt valued: at the old university, the prioritisation of high status research made it especially hard for teacher educators to feel confident about embarking on research themselves, and they and mentors felt that teacher education itself was undervalued too. This affected the teacher educators' emerging research identity. In contrast, teacher educators and mentors at the new university felt that teaching was valued more highly than research; in a different way, this also made it hard for teacher educators to develop research identities. However, there were many indications that this teaching emphasis was shifting, so that higher expectations were beginning to be set in relation to research. Eraut's (2004) work on the complex interaction between workplace expectations, leadership, support and employees' confidence and self identity has been highly enlightening in relation to these cultural contexts.

The need for work life balance has emerged as a minor but important theme too, with some possible gender differences of which universities need to take account. For research to flourish, the importance of an entitlement to and protection of research time for teacher educators has come through strongly, as well as the importance of structured research induction and a range of supportive practices within an active learning community. What the study overall has confirmed is that the research aspect of teacher educators' professional development needs as much attention and priority as the pedagogical aspects of their role.

Reflecting on the research process itself, the involvement of teacher educators as co-researchers has mirrored the interview findings in interesting ways. From their perspective, engagement with the project has helped the teacher educators to prioritise research as a legitimate activity, has raised their profile as researchers and has given new impetus to the doctoral work with which they are both involved. From the viewpoint of

the experienced researcher, the insights that they have contributed have enriched the project considerably.

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