**Practice, Theory and Research in Initial Teacher Education:
International Perspectives**

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) has been discussed from a wide range of perspectives, focusing on its structure and curriculum, on field experiences and coursework, and the interplay between them, as well as on the learning experiences of student teachers (Darling-Hammond, Newton and Wei 2010; Townsend 2011; Flores 2016). In a recent review, Craig (2016) argued that the structure of education is not only shaped by history, culture and economics, but increasingly dictated by politics. Thus, a more systemic analysis of ITE programmes is needed in order to fully understand its rationale and aims as well as its outcomes. This encompasses, therefore, the analysis of the nature and goals of school curriculum itself, the conception of the teacher as a professional and his/her role in curriculum development, the key components of ITE curriculum, and the political, economic, social and cultural context in which it is embedded. More recently, issues such as the formation of teacher identity in ITE and the role of research in connecting theory and practice and curriculum integration in ITE have been advocated (Flores 2016; Flores, Vieira, Silva and Almeida 2016).

The theory-practice divide is well documented in international literature (e.g. Van Nuland 2011; Flores 2016) and it has been identified as the perennial problem in ITE (Korthagen 2010). The reasons for this are diverse amongst which are the socialisation process into existing patterns in schools, the complexity of teaching, the nature of the learning process in ITE, the kind of knowledge valued (associated with the tension

between the more practical and the more formal one), and the ways in which the affective dimension is overlooked within a technical-rationality perspective (Korthagen 2010). An analysis of the international literature reveals that teaching practice in ITE varies not only in terms of location in the different programmes and of its length but also in regard to its philosophy, aims and assessment methods (Flores, Vieira, Silva and Almeida 2016). Thus, it is possible to identify different 'practices' in ITE curriculum internationally and diverse ways of articulating them with other components of the programmes.

In addition, a look at the curriculum plans of ITE internationally illustrates a diversity of ways of including research into teacher education programmes as well as ways of integrating it into practice and course work (Flores 2016). Overall, in Europe and elsewhere, the research component varies: in some cases it is non-existent; in other cases it is not explicit in ITE curriculum, as it depends on the higher education institutions to develop student teachers' research competences, for instance during practicum (Flores, 2016). In other cases, an explicit curriculum unit on research methods is included in the curriculum as well as an inquiry approach to the practicum (e.g. Niemi and Nevgi 2014; Flores, Vieira, Silva and Almeida 2016).

There are, therefore, clear variations across ITE programmes internationally in terms of the research dimension and its connection (or lack of it) with theory and practice. Different ways of understating 'research' in ITE and of putting it into place may also be identified as the papers included in this Special Issue clearly illustrate. In particular, this special issue addresses the following questions: i) What are the critical issues in the ITE curriculum internationally? ii) How is the research dimension integrated in ITE

programmes? iii) What are the approaches and strategies to integrate theory and practice in ITE internationally?

The collection of articles included in this special issue addresses, therefore, the topic of practice, theory and research in Initial Teacher Education internationally, including analyses from different perspectives and contexts.

This Special Issue begins with an article by Linda Darling-Hammond, from the USA, entitled'Teacher education around the world: what can we learn from international practice?' It looks at teacher education in international contexts which have well-developed systems for teacher education. In particular, the article analyses policies and practices in Australia, Canada, Finland, and Singapore related to issues of teacher recruitment, ITE, induction, and ongoing professional development. Darling-Hammond emphasises the importance of cross-country analyses in order to examine how ideas work in practice at the system level but also to identify the strategies used as well as their outcomes. She concludes that, although the systems of Finland, Canada, Australia, and Singapore differ in significant ways, 'what they have in common is that they are just that—*systems* for teacher and leader development'. The author draws attention to the multiple, coherent and complementary components of these systems in terms of recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers in schools. Darling-Hammond concludes with set of leading practices that might be considered as 'promising strategies' for improving teaching and teacher learning, namely: i) recruiting highly able candidates into high-quality programmes; ii) connecting theory and practice through the design of thoughtful coursework and the integration of high-quality clinical work in contexts in which good practice is nurtured; iii) using professional teaching standards to focus attention on the learning and evaluation of critical knowledge, skills, and dispositions;

iv) creating teacher performance assessments, based on professional standards, that connect student learning to classroom teaching.

The second paper entitled 'Research-based insights on initial teacher education in Spain', by Juana M. Sancho-Gil, Joan-Anton Sánchez-Valero, and Maria Domingo-Coscollola, looks at the development of teacher education in Spain by drawing upon findings from two wider research projects carried out by the authors. Policy documents and empirical data were analysed. The authors identify three key stages in ITE development in the Spanish context: a) Developmentalism and the last stage of Franco's dictatorship; b) Constructing democracy; and c) The implementation of the European Higher Education Area. Sancho-Gil et al. argue that the reform in ITE aimed at professionalising teachers and at moving beyond the view of initial preparation as a 'vocational training' as it was transferred to universities. In other words, they stress that ITE has shifted from a rather traditional, craft-oriented and ideological model towards a more academic and professional one. However, the existence of a prescribed curriculum and a subject-centred and fragmented-based notion of knowledge make it difficult for student teachers to anticipate and be prepared for the complexity of the teaching profession. They also emphasise the dominant teacher-centred teaching methods and the distance between teaching and learning experiences at the university and in schools. The paper concludes with a reflection about the theory, practice, teaching-research nexus which the authors consider as a particularly controversial matter and with a number of critical issues that teacher educators need to address.

In a similar vein, the third paper, entitled 'Theory, Practice and Research in Initial Teacher Education in Brazil: challenges and alternatives', by Maria Inês Marcondes, Vânia Finholdt Angelo Leite and Rosane Karl Ramos, focus on ITE in the Brazilian context,

based on the analysis of policy documents and a literature review. The authors state that there is a concern in policy documents in regard to the articulation between theory and practice, research and reflection. They draw attention to the creation of the Government Grant Program for Initial Teacher Education (the acronym PIBID in Portuguese), in 2009, whose aims were to foster and value the teaching career, and to improve the process of teacher education in all regions of Brazil, especially in public education. In particular, the programme was designed to strengthen teacher education in connection with basic education schools, to encourage schools in order to stimulate their teachers to act as co-educators (supervisors) in ITE, and to integrate theory and practice in ITE. Overall, Marcondes et al. argue that the programme has shown positive outcomes as far as the development of partnerships between universities and schools are concerned. They also point out that the programme has provided the opportunity for many student teachers to experience teaching in real schools from the very beginning of their teacher education programmes. The paper concludes with a number of challenges in the light of the complexity of the teaching context in public schools in Brazil, namely low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of self-esteem. Issues such as equity and social justice are put forward in the discussion of the findings for teacher education.

Also, Roza A. Valeeva and Ilshat R. Gafurov, in their paper 'Initial Teacher Education in Russia: Connecting theory, practice and research' look at the possibilities and challenges of ITE in the Russian context. They examine the changes and challenges of the political, socio-economic and cultural life of Russia in recent decades as it has moved towards different model, structure and curriculum of ITE. A competency-based approach has been introduced. The authors explore the new approach to teacher education in Kazan

Federal University which is used an illustrative example. They also look at the ways in which the research dimension is integrated in initial teacher education programmes, as well as new approaches and strategies to link theory and practice in ITE.

An example of the use of research projects in ITE programmes is described in the fifth paper, 'The contribution of graduation research to school development: Graduation research as a boundary practice', by Marco Snoek, Judith Bekebrede, Fadie Hanna, Theun Creton and Hester Edzes, from the Netherlands. The paper examines an initiative – graduation research - in the context of a primary teacher education programme, the goal of which is to articulate the personal level - where student teachers show their individual competence in regard to research skills and inquiring attitude - and the collaborative level – focusing on the contribution of the graduation research project at school. While the authors recognise that issues such as ownership, meaning and dialogue were of paramount importance, they acknowledge that embracing such an initiative is more than a matter of redesigning the ITE curriculum or a part of it. They conclude that moving beyond the individual level to encompass the collaborative level implies the consideration of new perspectives and new ways of looking at all actors, particularly the visibility of the student teachers within the school, taking the initiative and continually reflecting on their role and the position they choose to play in the school context. Within the framework of research-based teacher education, Snoek et al. argue for the need to move beyond the individual level and to consider graduation research as a contribution for improving school practice as a collective endeavour.

The sixth paper, 'The challenges to discussing emotionally loaded stories in Finnish teacher education', by E. Lassila, K. Jokikokko, M. Uitto and E. Estola, from Finland, addresses the experience of becoming a teacher within the context of a research-based

teacher education programme with a particular focus on the emotional and reflective dimensions. Based upon empirical data, the authors assert that sharing emotionally loaded stories is a challenging enterprise. Overall, findings support the contention that student teachers understand their work as more rationally oriented, 'even when given scope and encouragement to explore its emotional dimension'. The authors examine the potential of peer groups in supporting reflection along with other strategies such as reading, writing and storytelling. They also highlight that the strong emphasis on rational reflection in research-based teacher education may overlook emotional issues as a natural part of the process of learning, teaching and being a teacher.

In seventh paper 'Modeling and validating the learning opportunities of preservice language teachers: On the key components of the curriculum for teacher education', Johannes König, Albert Bremerich-Vos, Christiane Buchholtz, Sandra Lammerding, Sarah Strauß, Ilka Fladung & Charlotte Schleiffer, from Germany, look at the ways in which student teachers are provided with oopportunities to learn in ITE. Issues such as the representation of content in courses of the subject, subject-related pedagogy, and general pedagogy, as well as teaching practice are analysed. The authors assert that the more coherent the student teachers perceived their university-school relationship the better they were able to benefit from their teaching practice. Not surprisingly, the paper concludes that teaching practice is the central component in terms of student teachers' self-reported planning competence. The participants highlight that their professional learning was supported through activities in which they were required to link theory they had learned at university and practical situations.

In the final paper, 'Comparing the effectiveness of two models of initial teacher education programs in Israel: Concurrent vs. consecutive', Ruth Zuzovsky and Smadar

Donitsa-Schmidt, discuss findings from a piece of research aimed at investigating the effectiveness of two models of ITE programmes: the concurrent and the consecutive model. The authors claim that graduates of the consecutive model outperformed graduates of the concurrent model in most of the measures used in the study. The authors put forward two possible explanations: the profile of the students in each model and the layered manner in which the curricular components are organised in the two models. Issues such as the integration of the curriculum components of ITE as well as the interplay between them are also discussed.

These articles offer different perspectives and approaches to look at practice, theory and research in ITE programmes. They illustrate how these components are dealt with in diverse contexts and the challenges for improving ITE. Issues such as coherence and integration of various elements of ITE curriculum, the combination of teaching, research and researching teaching, the role of theory and practice in professional learning both in university and school settings are but few examples of the possibilities for rethinking both the curriculum and the pedagogy of teacher education. A more explicit and coherent connection between practice, theory and research is needed if ITE is to be seen as a space of transformation.

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