



THE ROLE OF RESEARCH IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

In Norway, as in many other countries, there is political pressure to make teacher education more research-based under the assumption that it is a means to improve teacher education. A 2014 governmental document, 'Lærerløftet' ('Lifting the teachers' – author's translation), reads:

As with any other higher education, teacher education shall be research-based. The content of teacher education shall be based on up-to-date knowledge. Research-based teaching also means that the education is characterised by scientific methods and oriented towards new ways of thinking and developing the practice field. (Norwegian Ministry of Education)

Research-based teacher education

When policy-makers and teacher educators use the term 'research-based' teacher education, I am not quite sure that they share the same understanding of the concept. I am certainly not in a position to say what others mean when talking about the need for a research-based teacher education, so various interpretations of the concept will be presented here. The first question is whether teacher education and the professionals working in teacher education should be consumers or producers of research. Teacher education in many countries, including Norway, is situated in higher education, and as such both teacher educators and students are expected to read research in the acquisition of required knowledge as well as skills. Reading lists are presented to the students at the beginning of each course or module, and teacher educators are likely to suggest research publications they themselves, as individuals or as teams, have found useful and explanatory in developing their own knowledge and understanding. The students are expected to read the items on the list and to refer to them in their own writing or in written/ oral exams. They have to document that they have become familiar

with the knowledge their teacher educators find relevant. Students and teacher educators in this case are consumers of research, which is, in most academic settings, a built-in role of actors within the academy.

However, a research-based teacher education is, as I see it, more than merely using the research of others in the teaching and learning processes, there are also expectations that teacher educators and students become producers of research. As research-based publications have become a decisive criterion of academic survival and promotion, teacher educators themselves are required to engage in.

Research competence and research facilities

As previously discussed, many teacher educators come into higher education with a background in school teaching, and their first-order expertise (Murray and Male 2005) will therefore be teaching. Their research competence is not always rich, and for many it is limited to methodology courses and research in relation to their master's thesis if they have written a research-based master's dissertation. Research expertise for this group of teacher educators will be a second-order expertise (Murray and Male 2005), which is, in many contexts, the kind of expertise that counts when pursuing an academic career. Having said this, however, in some contexts, especially in university-based teacher education, including in Norway, the majority of teacher educators have a disciplinary doctorate, and research is their first-order expertise, whereas they might experience more frustration with the teaching component of their job (Smith 2011). Yet they are not always experienced for research has to be highly correlated with the time and resources allotted to it, especially for new researchers who are also going through a process of learning the skill. The main responsibility for providing resources for research in teacher education lies with policy-makers and their decisions, and there are



noticeable differences between England and Norway in this regard. In England the literature speaks of decreasing resources for research due to the lack of importance policy-makers attach to teacher education research (eg Menter 2013), whereas in Norway political priorities have provided funding for numerous research and development projects, as well as the establishment of a Norwegian National Research School in Teacher Education (NAFOL) (Østern & Smith 2013). The main goal of both initiatives is to develop, in a long-term perspective, a research-based teacher education to improve Norwegian education at all levels

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As long as researching teacher educators are expected to engage in research on top of full-time teaching requirements, it will be difficult to create a research-based teacher education. Conducting research is time-consuming, and the demand

Conclusions

The claim made in this paper is that teacher education would benefit from being research-based, and that actors in teacher education, teacher educators and students of teaching act

as consumers as well as producers of research. The role of research in teacher education is emphasised in the report on teacher education by the European Commission in 2013:

Both practice-based and theory-focused research can contribute to a deeper understanding of education and of educating teachers. However, in universities, practice-based research tends to be considered of inferior value, if compared with more traditional types of research, such as theoretical, subject-specific studies. (European Commission 2013: 12–13)

All research is useful for academic education; however, practice-oriented research, which is useful to the practice field and can lead to changes in schools

and teacher education, is of great relevance to the teacher education community, school teachers and leaders, and policy-makers. Becoming a researcher is mainly a hands-on learning process, and there ought to be opportunities for all teacher educators to engage in supported development processes as researchers. A strong linkage between the demand for teacher educators, as employees in higher education, to produce and publish research, and sufficient supportive initiatives at a national as well as institutional level has to be made and become visible to all education stakeholders. This does not seem to be the case in a number of European countries according to the report from the European Commission:

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