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The professional agency of teacher educators amid academic discourses

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Agency has been seen as fundamental in the renegotiation of professional identities. However, it is unclear how teacher educators exercise their professional agency in their work, and how multiple discourses frame and restrict the practice of their professional agency. This study examines how teacher educators practise agency in negotiating their professional identities amid the multiple discourses emerging from the academic context of their work. Our aim was to investigate educators' locally expressed professional agency in the context of the more global discourses that may construct teacher educator identities. In our analysis we applied thematic discursive analysis to address patterns of talk relating to teacher educators' manifestations of agency within their work as teachers and researchers. We found that professional agency was strong in the construction of their teacher-identity. By contrast, the construction of their researcher-identity was subjugated, complex, and characterized by a lack of resources. Furthermore, teaching and researching were mainly described as two separate functions. We discuss what these findings imply for the renegotiation of teacher educators' professional identities and for the development of teacher education in an academic institution.

Introduction: From teacher-identity to researcher-identity

In recent years, discourses concerning teacher education have multiplied in both public and academic domains (Korthagen, Loughran & Lunenberg 2005; Murray 2008). The resulting discursive transformations have caused tensions in the work of teacher educators, who are increasingly required to redefine their professional identity, moving away from the traditional identity of "me as teacher" towards that of "me as researcher" (Cochran-Smith 2005; Murray 2007). As researchers they are expected to be involved with ongoing systematic enquiry as a key element in their work. In parallel with demands for more research, teacher educators are also required to develop their own practices and teaching in a systematic way (Helleve 2010; Margolin 2007; Smith 2003). The demands imposed on teacher educators can be seen as partly conflicting, and as creating tensions in teacher education and in the work of teacher educators. The demands have varied over different times and in different national contexts; what is clear, however, is that the role of teacher educators as researchers is increasingly being emphasized, and that this is happening in many countries (e.g. Arreman 2005; Cochran-Smith 2005; Livingston, McCall & Morgado 2009; Murray et al. 2009; Robinson & McMillan 2006).

The demands made on teacher educators, and especially the requirement to become a researcher and an academic scholar, have raised the issue of how teacher educators can widen their competencies and renegotiate their professional identities in their local workplace settings. Professional identity can be understood as negotiated in a mutually constitutive relationship between the individual actor and the social context (Lasky 2005; Sfard & Prusak 2005). This negotiation is a dynamic process, one that intertwines external suggestions coming from the social context with individuals' internal expectations as they seek to make sense of themselves and their work (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop 2004; Cohen 2009). Thus, professional identities are seen as constructed by participation in the practices and discourses of work organizations. Within this process, organizational norms and instructions may be appropriated, adopted, ignored, or resisted (Wells 2007).

Recent studies have underlined the meaning of professional agency in professional identity negotiations (Billett 2006b; Fenwick 2006). These negotiations emphasize the interdependence between professional identity and perceived agency. Practising agency is seen as important, on the grounds that individual agency is fundamental in the renegotiation of professional identities, within the dynamic practices and discourses of present-day workplace settings (Billett & Smith 2006; Eteläpelto 2008; Watson 2008; Ybema et al. 2009).

For more than thirty years now – longer than in any other country – the Finnish teacher training system has had an academic orientation. This has been the case since 1974, when the education of primary and secondary school teachers was transferred as in its entirety to the universities. The teacher training has a strong research emphasis, and it aims to educate autonomous and reflective teachers who will be capable of taking a research-oriented attitude towards their work. Hence, teachers are expected to take an analytical approach to their work, to draw conclusions based on their experiences, and to develop their teaching and learning environments in a systematic way (Krokfors et al. 2006; Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen 2006). This means that Finland offers an interesting context in which to examine teacher educators' various professional roles and identities.

The academically-based teacher education found in Finland – and increasingly elsewhere – imposes high standards on teacher educators. They are considered to be academic professionals who are responsible for conducting academic research themselves, keeping up active societal relations, and providing research-based teacher education. Their duties include the supervision of masters-level theses. Thus, for example, to be appointed as a senior lecturer in a teacher education department one must have a Doctoral degree and a high level of pedagogical competence. This means that in the Finnish system, teacher educators are mostly recruited from the field of higher education, and that only a few of them are qualified as school teachers. In this sense the Finnish system differs considerably from, for example, the English system, where nearly all teacher educators are qualified in the school or college sectors (e.g. Murray 2008).

Because teachers in Finland are educated at university level, changes in the academic context have a direct influence on teacher education. In recent times, discussions on the university sector have emphasized the turbulent nature of present-day academic work and the erosion of academic professionalism (e.g. Murray 2008). It is true that teacher educators in Finland are still relatively autonomous, and that they remain strongly committed to their work and work organization (Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, Eteläpelto, Rasku-Puttonen & Littleton 2008). However, we do not know how teacher educators exercise their professional agency in their fairly autonomous workplace context, or how the multiple discourses that are present frame and restrict the practice of their professional agency. Challenged by this, we recognized a need to examine how teacher educators practise agency in negotiating their professional identities amid the academic discourses that are present in their local work contexts. We shall look at the intertwining of the professional agency of teacher educators with the social context, considering the accounts given by educators, and the ways in which these accounts represent collective resources for agentic actions. We are interested in how teacher educators exercise professional agency in negotiating their *teacher*- and *researcher*-identities, and how professional agency is manifested in their local work contexts at individual level, at work-community level, and at organizational levels. In what follows, we shall outline our theoretical starting points, give a brief general review of the concept of agency, and in particular, introduce our understanding of what teacher educators' professional agency actually consists of.

Teacher educators' professional agency and the social context of teacher education

This study is based on a socio-cultural approach, and it seeks to conceptualize the interplay between individual actors and the social context. Within this approach the emphasis is on cultural aspects of human development, and the main concern is with the social context and the cultural tools that shape the development of human understanding and ways of acting (Vygotsky 1962). Human understanding and acting are perceived as always being shaped by cultural, historical, and social structures (Lasky 2005; Wertsch 1991). Individual actions are thus always

afforded and constrained by the social context, and influenced by mediational phenomena, including language (Wertsch, Tulviste & Hagstrom 1993). With regard to agency, such an approach assumes that agency is not automatically attributed to isolated individuals; rather it is often socially distributed or shared. Overall, taking a socio-cultural view, agency is seen as the capacity to change a context, with people acting in such a way as to affect their immediate settings through resources that are culturally, socially, and historically developed (Lasky 2005).

Most recent examinations of agency share the aim of understanding how individual agency and social context are intertwined and mutually constitutive (Billett, Harteis & Eteläpelto 2008). However, they offer different ideas concerning this relationship, and differing emphases on how individuals embedded within particular contexts are to be conceptualized and theorized. One trend in recent discussions of agency has been criticism of the prevalent socio-cultural framework, on the grounds that it neglects the active role of individual subjects (e.g. Billett 2006b; Eteläpelto 2008) and pays insufficient attention to power relations (e.g. Lewis, Enciso & Moje 2007). Thus, scholars have perceived a need to reframe socio-cultural theory, taking a more critical perspective, and addressing in particular the intertwined nature of identity, agency, and power. With this in mind, many scholars have been drawn to post-structural and discourse theories, seeing these as enabling a broader understanding of the social, cultural, and political aspects of reality, and of how these shape/are shaped by individuals within particular cultural contexts (Lewis et al. 2007).

Broadly speaking, it can be said that the discursive approach emphasizes the ways in which language, talk, and texts are used to perform actions. The discursive approach aims to make visible the ways in which discourses are central to action, and the ways in which they are used to constitute identities (Edley & Wetherell 1997; Potter & Wetherell 1994). However, the discursive approach offers a large number of partially contrasting guidelines for understanding agency. In the field of discursive psychology it has been commonplace to distinguish between a

theoretical approach influenced by conversation analysis and a more global form of analysis derived from post-structuralism (Wetherell & Edley 1999).

Critical discursive psychology offers a "synthetic approach" (Wetherell 1998) and strives to combine these two frameworks. In this approach people's talk is seen as reflecting not only the local meanings of a particular context but also broader and more global patterns of collective sense-making and understanding (Hökkä, Eteläpelto & Rasku-Puttonen 2010; Wetherell & Edley 1999). Individual actors are understood as embedded in relationally constructed flows of practices, partly subjected to discursive resources, but continuously utilizing and renegotiating these resources (Taylor & Littleton 2008; Wetherell 1998; 2005). The emphasis is on social and cultural resources as sources for individual meaning-construction, with individual agency and social practices seen as intertwined. The aim in this regard is to understand the ways in which agency and social structure become practical issues for people engaged in their local communities. Thus, agency is seen as a discursive resource rather than as a state or essence. The interest then is in investigating when people invoke agency, and when they invoke external determinants (Wetherell 2005).

To sum up our own position, we understand agency as socially shared, culturally, historically, and socially shaped, and provided through mediational means (Lasky 2005; Wertsch, Tulviste & Hagstrom 1993). Within the socio-cultural perspective we have applied a discursive approach, seeing teacher educators' agency as constrained and constructed within different discourses and socially, culturally, and historically mediated local practices (Wetherell 2005). In the midst of these culturally-mediated social contexts and practices, the educators themselves are seen as utilizing different discourses as resources for their professional identity negotiation. Thus, agency is not regarded as an individual capability or set of autonomous actions, but rather as a process of identity negotiation, in iterative relationships with the context (Biesta & Tedder 2007; Lawy & Tedder 2009). In these relationships and negotiating processes we emphasize the importance of language, seeing it as entering into a reciprocal association: the accounts constituted in language construct the world, and the language itself reflects and is

constructed by the world (Potter 1996). We understand language as a pre-eminent tool mediating between individual actors and the social context, and we see language and culture as tightly interwoven (Ahearn 2001; Lewis et al. 2007).

In accordance with this, we see the educators' professional agency as referring to the capacity to meaningfully construct and display their professional identity within socially defined contexts, in other words their *capacity to negotiate and renegotiate professional identities* within their local work practices. In addition, we see agency as referring to the idea of the "active" agent – the individual who is able to act on and influence the social context. Hence, we understand agency also as the *teacher educators' capacity to act* in socio-culturally mediated contexts (Ahearn 2001). This acting involves the capacity to do things in respect of the individual's own intentions – but still within the operative social and contextual constraints. Hence, with a view to gaining a perspective on the recent challenges posed to teacher education and teacher educators, this study seeks to achieve a better understanding of the complexity of the interplay between teacher educators' professional agency and the social context, with its resources and obstacles.

Aim and research questions

In this study we aim to examine teacher educators' locally expressed agency in the context of the more global and socially shared discourses that may construct teacher educator identities. Our focus is on investigating teacher educators' professional agency in terms of their identity negotiations as teachers and researchers. Our particular study questions were framed as follows: (i) *How do teacher educators exercise agency in terms of their teacher- and researcher-identity at individual, work-community, and organizational levels?* (ii) *What kind of relationships exist between teacher- and researcher-identities in the manifestation of agency?*

Methods

Data collection and interviewees

The study reported here was conducted in one teacher education department in a large multidisciplinary Finnish university. The department in question has the longest history of teacher education in the country, and has an excellent reputation. It is staffed by approximately 80 teacher educators and 30 other employees, and thus it is one of the largest teacher education departments in Finland. One particular feature of this study is the role of the first author; she has had roles both as a practitioner and as a researcher, having worked at the teacher education department in question as a Departmental Coordinator (from 2000 to 2006).

The main data for this research were collected by the first author, through open-ended interviews with eight teacher educators in 2005. The research data were supplemented by means of a research diary that she kept while working in the department. The interviews followed an open-ended format, the aim being to keep them as open and as flexible as possible in registering the participants' perceptions and accounts. Nevertheless, the data-gathering did make use of an interview guide, i.e. a method previously used as one means of conducting open-ended interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Patton 2002). An interview guide is a script that lists the questions that are to be talked through in the course of an interview, in a more or less regular format. It thus provides topics within which the interviewer is free to ask questions that will illuminate the topic under study. Hence, the interviewer is free to build a conversation, but at the same time will maintain the focus on a particular, predetermined research topic (Hoffmann 2007; Patton 2002).

In the interviews, the teacher educators' agency was approached in a "three-dimensional" way to include influences from the past, engagement with the present, and orientations towards the future (Emirbayer & Mische 1998). The interview guide included four main themes: (i) reasons for becoming a teacher educator, (ii) teacher educators' experiences of working in the department, (iii) possibilities for developing as a teacher educator, and (iv) future expectations concerning work. Within these four overarching themes there were several questions that were intended to open up the conversation and guide the interview, if the conversation was slipping into issues that were outside the focus of the

research. As Rapley (2007) points out, interviewing is never "just conversation," even though it may take a conversational form, since the interviewer must have some level of control.

In this study the aim was to collect a rich, multifaceted, and representative data-set encompassing as wide a variety of teacher educators' accounts as possible; hence the main author formulated in advance profiles of different kinds of teacher educators that should be included as interviewees. This kind of *purposive sampling* aims to utilize the best informants on the phenomena under study (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Silverman 2005). According to Johnson (2002), in interview studies the best informants are those who have been thoroughly enculturated in the setting or community, have recent membership participation, have some provisional interest in assisting the interviewer, and who have adequate time and resources to take part in the interviews. In this study the focus was on having representatives of different categories of age, sex, academic status, subject taught, and length of work history in the department. Because of the first author's experience of the department and familiarity with the personnel, she was able to choose certain teacher educators as key informants in terms of representing these different categories.

In selecting the participants it was assumed that the accounts constructed in the interviews and the language used would reflect also the knowledge and perceptions of the other teacher educators in the department, and thus that it would adequately represent different discourses within the work organization. Since we were interested in socially shared and communal meanings, we assumed that these shared meanings could be found among the range of informants interviewed in the study. Although the actual number of informants was relatively small, they gave rise to a multiple and rich data set (as transcribed, 187 pages, A4, single spaced), and to patterns indicating knowledge shared also by other members of the community. Note that in discursive approaches it is not unusual for the patterns revealed in interviews to be taken as indicating knowledge shared by other members of the culture under study (Taylor 2001). All in all, the teacher educators who were asked to take part in the interviews were selected as key informants representing different

categories of age, sex, academic status, subject taught, and length of work history in the department. There was at least one representative from all of the professional groups in the department: assistants, university teachers, lecturers, professors. More precise information cannot be given, for reasons of confidentiality.

The manner of the interviews was mostly informal and conversational, since the interviewer and interviewees were equally familiar with the culture of the department and its local discourses. Indeed, one could say that the interviews were more like conversations between two colleagues than research interviews in their traditional form. However, adherence to the interview guide was a way to maintain a high degree of control over the course of the interviews (Patton 2002; Rapley 2007). The interviews also included a drawing task in which the participants were asked to draw a diagram of every significant workgroup they belonged to, both at the departmental (i.e. teacher education department) and the organizational (i.e. university) level. These drawings were discussed at the interviews and the discussions were tape-recorded. The individual interviews lasted from about one and a half hours to two and a half hours, and the overall duration of the interviews was fourteen hours in total. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Ethical issues had to be considered throughout the research process, from the first preliminary formulation of the study task to the final report (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Taylor 2001). In this study ethical issues had direct effects on the decisions concerning methodological choices, since the anonymity of the organization under study could not be sustained and the interviewees were known to the researchers, at least to some extent. In order to secure the anonymity of the participants, the data were analysed on a cross-case basis. This means that the analysis focused on collective and shared meanings across the whole data corpus, and not, for example on individual narratives. Furthermore, the use of discursive methods can be seen as one further means of protecting the anonymity of the informants. The discursive approach offered an ethically sound way to analyse the data, in the sense that the interviews could be approached "only" as a text and not as expressions of participants' experiences and perceptions.

The main interview data were supplemented through a research diary compiled by the main author between May 2002 and June 2006. During this period she wrote up her own observations, experiences, and ideas about being a member of teacher education department and working there. The overall length of the research diary material was 28 pages (A4, single spaced). The research diary was used as complementary material. It offered an important mirror by which the first author could critically reflect on and analyse her experiences of the department under study. These issues are examined in more detail in the Discussion section.

Data analysis

In the data analysis we adopted a qualitative approach, applying thematic discursive analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006; Potter & Wetherell 1987). We addressed socially shared patterns of talk related to teacher educators' manifestation of agency in their work as teachers and researchers. Thus, the analysis was conducted on a cross-case basis, meaning that patterns were searched for and analysed both *within* and *across* individual interviews, rather than regarded as the expression of individual identity. In order to analyse the educators' accounts in detail and at a practical level, we considered two different aspects within the analysing process. Note that in analysing discursive data, such different elements are not "stages": the analytical process is not so much sequential as iterative – although systematic in the sense that it involves careful sorting to ensure that all the research material is considered (Taylor & Littleton 2006).

As a first task, after reading and re-reading the whole data set, the transcriptions were thematized according to the educators' teacher- and researcher-talk at different levels of local practices. As different levels we considered the *individual* level, the *work community* level (subject-matter groups), the *departmental* level, and the *organizational* level (the university). The aim here was to understand how agency is manifested within the social context of practical and local communities. After that, the thematized accounts were coded according to the educators' explicit expressions concerning (i) the exercise of agency, and (ii) the obstacles that

subjugated their professional identity negotiation and work. Within this process, we counted the instances of each theme that we identified as occurring in the data; this was done to ensure systematic and careful sorting, and to guarantee that all the research material was considered. This process was not linear, but iterative, and that it involved continually moving back and forward within the entire data set. Through the coding process we were able to identify the prevailing patterns when the interviewees described their work as educators.

As the second task in the data analysis we compared the various agency accounts (as noted during the first task), focusing on the most prominent tensions and conflicting patterns of talk. At this point we paid particular attention to the educators' individual accounts within the unique context of their talk. We elaborated when they invoked agency, and when they invoked external determinants in referring to different levels of their practices. However, rather than focusing on individual variations in identity negotiations and agency, we paid particular attention to collectively shared elements, i.e. to aspects that could be taken as commonalities of the educators' talk. In so doing, we sought to explore especially the social resources available to the educators in their identity negotiations. Thus, the data extracts presented here will be illustrative of relevant social resources and obstacles, rather than a presentation of all the data analysed.

Findings

Our findings show teacher educators manifested a strong sense of agency when describing their work as teachers. This implies that being an active agent requires negotiation of one's own position in the work community, primarily as a teacher. However, in contrast to the teacher-identity, the negotiation of researcher-identity emerged as subjugated and conflicting. In fact, the prevailing pattern in talking about working as a researcher reflected a lack of agency, with only minor resources for research at every level of practice.

As a second task we addressed the most prominent tensions concerning agency as manifested in teacher- and researcher-talk. In the sections below, we focus on the

contradictory relationship between teacher- and researcher-talk, and compare how teacher educators manifest their agency in these two types of discourse. In discursive studies it is imperative to anchor analytical observations firmly to the data in order to let readers evaluate the data on which the analysis is based (Nikander 2008; Potter & Edwards 2001). Thus, the following findings will be supplemented with authentic data extracts representing the predominant patterns in teacher educators' accounts of their work. The extracts below exhibit these patterns, illustrating the exercise of agency at different local levels (individual, work community, departmental, and organizational levels). They also demonstrate the obstacles and resources affecting the practice of agency. At the end of this section there is a summary of the main findings.

The agency of teacher educators as exercised in teacher-talk

The prevailing pattern of talk concerning *individual-level teaching* reflected total ownership and more or less unrestricted possibilities for agentic practices. In the following extract, one teacher educator describes his individual-level teaching, and his possibilities for agentic actions at this level.

Extract 1
I can have enormous influence over my own work. It's just as if everyone can look after their own job and you can do whatever you like. For example with [name] we started to teach [subject] together, and we just needed to book adjoining rooms and reserve the same time for teaching. Then we got the students into one of the rooms and started teaching together. So it went really easily because we didn't need to get permission from anybody…And after that we could work away totally freely (Teacher educator 1).

Here the educator explains the possibilities to affect his own work, which he sees as explicitly connected to his individual-level teaching. After saying that "everyone can look after their own job and you can do whatever you like" he draws support for that claim from his possibilities to work with his teaching groups in precisely the way he wants. Here he is constructing a picture of a totally autonomous actor, someone who is capable of conducting his teaching mission by his own means. When he describes a teaching project with another educator, he says that they needed to ask permission from the leaders of the department at the

time. The permission was needed because projects usually produce extra costs, and a requirement for departmental funding. However, the request for permission is described as a routine action: "We didn't need to get permission from anybody… and after that we could work away totally freely." Thus, the working context is described as offering opportunities for practising agency at the individual level of teaching. This implies that the educator has sufficient resources for his teacher-identity construction, and that there is a balance between the social demands of "teacher-educator-as-teacher" and his own professional identity as a teacher educator.

The prevailing patterns for talking about practices at *work community level* in teaching were closely connected with working in subject-matter groups. Such groups were described as resources for identifying with and committing oneself to a certain community. Subject groups were described as contexts where educators can compare, discuss, and plan their work as teachers, and also where they can learn and develop their teaching practices.

Extract 2
My own subject group is the only place in which at this moment and in recent years it's been possible to discuss matters in real depth and detail, looking at an issue fully, applying the whole of one's knowledge, examining one's own work and work community. All these things on a general level – although I've been actually present in a work group as well, it's been a completely different kind of thing. I've had to take on more of the role of an auditor with the right to attend but not participate (Teacher educator 3).

In this extract the teacher educator underlines the importance of the in-detail and in-depth processing of issues related to core work. She sees this as possible in subject-matter groups. She uses emphatic words and phrases such as "the only place in which […] it's been possible to discuss matters in real depth and detail" to emphasize the importance of the subject group as a resource for identity construction as a professional teacher. She also compares subject groups with other working groups in the department. Her own subject group is here defined as a context where the speaker has her own voice and the possibility to be recognized as an active participant and actor; by contrast, other working groups in the

department are described as contexts where participation is limited, and where her own voice is subjugated.

When participants described their working practices (as teachers) at the *departmental level,* the most common pattern concerned categorization and cliques. This usually meant being labelled according to one's subject. It was often described as leading to distinct camps within the department. This implies that at the departmental level, professional identity construction is subjugated: educators are seen mainly as representatives of their own subject group, and as having the voice of the subject teacher. The prevailing pattern of talking about departmental work reflected a kind of externally defined "frozen" identity. In addition, the educators commonly indicated that at departmental level they could not safely share all their expertise and knowledge with their colleagues.

Extract 3
Well maybe what's bothered me pretty much the most during the time I've been here is that people really put each other into particular categories and you can't get rid of these conceptions. And it inevitably leads to these kinds of camps being formed and inevitably creates these kinds of boundary-fences as regards people's ideas. And then it has an effect on one's whole existence as a person, the idea that you are classified into some particular category and that you can't think of anything else and can't do anything else. And you can never get rid of these conceptions, that kind of thing really bothers me a lot (Teacher educator 6).

The extract above contains accounts of working in the departmental context. The issue that emerges strongly is labelling and categorization by other educators in the department. The interviewee makes a clear reference to the subjugation coming from other educators, and from their perceptions concerning who she is as an academic teacher. She underlines her sense that this labelling affects her own understanding of who she is, and her "whole existence as a person". She also describes these categorizations as permanent in nature, things that "you can never get rid of".

The teacher educators' accounts of being a teacher at the wider *organization level* could be categorized as representing two main patterns. First of all, the interviewees often described *other* departments as resources for their teacher-

identity construction. Working with scholars from various departments was explained as giving the opportunity to collaborate with people who have similar interests and aims, and who have up-to-date knowledge of issues. Another prevailing pattern in the talk at this level involved the central administration, and the demands and control it tried to exert on teacher educators' work. Yet even in this regard the accounts reflected agency, with possibilities to resist the manoeuvres of central administration. The educators indicated that they were able to oppose the directions set by central administrators by ignoring them, or by using minimal effort in fulfilling them.

Extract 4
Well, departmental meetings are pretty meaningless affairs. I mean, somehow I get the picture that they start off from some point other than people's own needs. Or from the fact that the central administration places certain demands on us and these demands have to be met, and if they are to be met then people have to be organized. And I think that's somehow the basic logic. And then these, you could say, the rank-and-file teachers want to resist these things, or at least not do anything (Teacher educator 1).

In the extract above the educator describes departmental meetings and links them to a stage of administrative subjugation. However, the educators are described as active actors; they have the power to resist the demands coming from outside the department, i.e. at the organizational level. In this pattern, the educators' agency is described in terms of resistance, manifested by ignoring the demands coming from central administration.

The agency of teacher educators as exercised in researcher-talk

When we compared teacher educators' accounts of their work as teachers and researchers, the patterns they used varied considerably. While teacher-talk reflected plenty of possibilities and resources for agency, researcher-talk was quantifiably less abundant, and it also reflected social and contextual constraints at work.

At the individual level the most common pattern in talk about being a researcher reflected subjugation, with few possibilities for researcher-identity negotiations.

However, despite the subjugation present in researcher talk, the demand to be a researcher and an academic scholar had to be solved and explained in an accepted way. The prevailing pattern in solving this demand was reference to the future, with the hope that there would be opportunities to do research at some unspecified time. Another pattern involved reference to doing one's own research as a hobby. Research was explained as an enterprise realized in one's spare-time and holidays, not as an integrated aspect of one's everyday work. Generally, this was explained as resulting from a work plan which was full of face-to-face teaching or administrative work. Furthermore, even if research was included in the work plan, it was usually seen as impossible to carry out within working hours, since teaching and other responsibilities took so much time and effort.

Extract 5
For the future, I look forward to being able to increase the amount of research. I mean the proportion of research. And that I could use my working time to do research, perhaps half of it at some stage (Teacher educator 8).

Extract 5 above contains the common pattern of referring to the future, hoping to do research "some day", but with specific mention also of the wish to do research within the speaker's *own working hours*. Note the contrast in the following extract (6), which exemplifies the pattern of talking about research as something *isolated from everyday work*.

Extract 6
There is no co-operation in research since I haven't had time to do research, and any research that I manage to do is totally connected with my own materials (Teacher educator 8).

Here the speaker describes research as something which in fact he cannot do, due to insufficient time. In saying "any research I manage to do" the speaker implies that since there is no time for research, the opportunity must be earned or seized. The expression "research […] is totally connected with my own materials" implies that the research he is able to do is unconnected with his work as an educator, belonging to pursuits separate from his everyday work.

In our data there was no discussion at all concerning research activity in the various subject-matter groups, i.e. *at work-community level*. Subject groups were mentioned only when talking about teaching practices, or the developing of teaching practices. Thus, it seems that the subject groups do not offer resources of any kind for researcher-identity negotiations, and that researcher-identity is not constructed at this level at all.

Departmental level accounts concerning research activity were also rare. The data contained no talk of common research projects or shared research resources. The talk reflecting departmental-level activities was connected to administrative issues, and especially to working-plan negotiations. The prevailing pattern was to refer to the fact that the work plan was full of contact teaching, and that in fact there were no resources for research activity.

Extract 7
Somehow it feels right now that I just haven't had time to do my own research and it's just something that's been bothering me and stressing me. And when you haven't had time to do it or get into it, even though it would be interesting and pleasant to do it, and you should do it for the sake of your work as well (Teacher educator 5).

Here the teacher educator strongly invokes a lack of resources as an obstacle to research. This extract illustrates the lack of agency in researcher negotiations and researcher work. She points out the contradiction between professional demands as an academic scholar, and the absence of resources to fulfil these demands, describing research as something which should be done but cannot be implemented due to the time factor. She also highlights the contradiction between the absence of resources and her own aim to work as a researcher. She further describes this lack of resources as "something that's been bothering me and stressing me".

As regards *organizational level* accounts related to working as a researcher, this pattern could not be identified at all in our data. However, it was observed that one educator described his work as a researcher in a way that revealed – in an obvious manner – the conflicting relationship between the organizational demands placed

on academic scholars and the educator's individual perceptions concerning his work. Even though it cannot be said that this was a prevailing pattern, it is worth including this extract to illustrate the contradiction between social demands and the educators' individual perceptions.

Extract 8
Here there's a basic contradiction, that I have to do research and publish articles, and that's quite OK. But now when a lot of my time goes on teaching, and when the rest of the time goes on doing my own research, then I don't have any time left for reading. It would be interesting as far as education is concerned. And if I think that I should become a good teacher some day, then in these jobs it means that I should have time for more broadly-based general culture in the field of pedagogics, and this means that I should have time to read all sorts of things, and now unfortunately the time isn't there. And the thing is that from the point of view of the department it would make sense if I didn't have to produce reports, and if I could read different kinds of things in peace (Teacher educator 1).

In this extract the educator brings up the juxtaposition between his own perceptions of himself as a good teacher, an expert in "broadly-based general culture in the field of pedagogics" and the organizational-level demands placed on academic actors. He says that his aim is to become a good teacher some day, but that this objective is challenged due to the demands placed on scholars to produce research reports and other publications. He indicates that such demands actually threaten his professional development, by forcing him to produce the kinds of results that are expected of him instead of being able (as he would wish) to broaden his pedagogical vision and expertise by studying "different kinds of things in peace". This extract also underlines the conception of a teacher educator's identity being primarily that of a teacher. The production of new knowledge is not regarded as a value in itself, but rather as a tool to promote one's own development specifically as a teacher. Table 1 summarizes the main findings.

- Insert the Table 1 about here -

Discussion

This study has presented some critical aspects concerning the interplay between social context and the opportunities/obstacles offered regarding teacher educators' exercise of agency in their identity negotiation and work. Our particular focus has been on understanding the social and culturally shared resources for exercising professional agency rather than on examining agency in individual identity negotiations. Our concern is with the shared and iterative commonalities in manifestations of professional agency in teacher educators' accounts of their work. We see the educators' talk as reflecting not only local resources/obstacles in identity construction, but also more global patterns in the collective understanding of teacher educators' work.

Our main finding was that teacher educators' professional agency was strong in the construction of their teacher-identity. By contrast, the construction of their researcher-identity was subjugated, complex, and characterized by a lack of resources. The accounts reflected a lack of agency, with minor resources for identity construction or for working as a researcher. For example, subject-matter groups, which were described as having major importance in teacher-identity construction, were simply not mentioned as a resource of any kind in researcher-identity construction. Furthermore, teaching and researching were mainly described as two separate functions. We found these findings fairly surprising in the context of Finnish teacher education, where the discourse of academic and research-based teacher education has prevailed for decades (Krokfors 2007; Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen 2006). All in all, it seemed that organization and subject groups offered support for educators' identity negotiations as teachers, but that these contexts did not support the negotiation of researcher-identity. One particular feature of the data was the subjugation of agency at *departmental* level, in terms of most of the aspects of professional identity negotiation that we studied. Departmental level accounts mainly contained patterns related to working with other teacher educators in the department, or to departmental administration.

Teacher educators' polyphonic relation to research is a central issue on a global scale. Recent studies in different parts of the world have discussed the problematic relationship of teacher educators to research (e.g. Cochran-Smith 2005; Lunenberg & Willemse 2006; Robinson & McMillan 2006). In many countries, teacher educators work in universities and thus have dual role as researchers and practitioners: they are expected to be experts in teaching and learning, and at the same time are judged according to the quality of their research and the number of publications they produce (Korthagen et al. 2005). As researchers they are expected to be intelligent consumers of research, meaning that they need to be able to interpret new research findings and have expertise in conducting research on their own practices (Cochran-Smith 2005). This viewpoint emphasizes the value of ongoing systematic enquiry as a key element in teacher educators' work. It also underlines the notion that active engagement with the processes of research should involve *all* teacher educators and not just a few active researchers within a teacher education department (Livingston et al. 2009).

There are, nevertheless, other views on the relationship between teacher educators and research. Murray (2008) argues that not all teacher educators need to be involved in conventional published research in education. Rather, it should be acknowledged that there are numerous forms of being involved as an academic scholar – for example: engagement in educational studies through sustained reading and reflection; enquiries into personal practice; action research; communal participation in small-scale studies published in professional journals; writing books and teaching materials; involvement in large national or international research projects. Murray further argues that teacher education must oppose the prevailing way of defining research narrowly as the production of published research papers adhering to criteria set by external auditors or national education standards (Murray 2008).

Recent global changes in higher education have posed challenges to professional teacher educators and their identity negotiations. In particular, many countries have seen demands for more research or evidence-based practice and for a rigorous approach to the rating of research quality (e.g. Livingston et al. 2009).

The demands in question are related to larger changes in educational organizations and in the university sector. These areas have seen the adoption of a new public management culture, involving rigid administrative procedures, a strong emphasis on accountability, and a strategy-led orientation. All this has brought with it increased control over teachers' work and the erosion of academic professionalism (e.g. Murray 2008). We can see a discrepancy here: the university context requires teacher educators to work as academic researchers and to produce international research reports, but it offers only limited resources for them to practise their agency as researchers, or to exercise agency in researcher-identity negotiations. Many studies have emphasized the importance of individual-level agency in working life, and especially in reform contexts (e.g. Billett & Pavlova 2005; Vähäsantanen & Billett 2008). The lack of agency as a researcher may affect the well-being of teacher educators in a situation where they are expected to be active academic scholars producing high-quality research – despite a lack of adequate resources for research, or possibilities for researcher-identity negotiations.

In the context of recent requirements set for teacher educators, and in the light of our findings, we would highlight the importance of a balance between the social demands imposed on teacher educators and the resources they can utilize in negotiating/re-negotiating their professional identities. In the case of teacher educators as academic professionals, our study showed that teacher educators' agency in researcher-identity negotiations is restricted and complex. Nevertheless, simply giving more flexibility, time, or resources for research will not offer a complete solution. Recent studies have shown that although teacher educators face national and organizational pressures to be involved actively in research, many of them would prefer to use any additional working time to protect their pedagogical power and their social role as a teacher (Robinson & McMillan 2006). Moreover, there is evidence that strong agency in one's own teaching mission can support an individualistic working culture and impede boundary crossing between different subject-matter groups at the organizational level (Hökkä, Rasku-Puttonen & Eteläpelto 2008); hence it can hinder community learning and organizational development (Hökkä et al. 2010; Vähäsantanen et al. 2008). We would therefore suggest that it will be crucial to develop new ways to strengthen the connection

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between teaching and research activities in order to enhance the quality and attractiveness of research within teacher education. We would agree with Livingston et al. (2009) that research should be a fundamental element of every teacher educator's everyday work, not just the privilege of few active researchers within a department. This would mean that working as an academic scholar should be understood more broadly than just the production of published research reports – a point made also by Murray (2008).

In this study, teacher educators' professional agency has been examined via a discursive approach. Thus, there are limitations to be considered – relating in part to ethical issues – in evaluating the reliability of the study. One methodological and ethical aspect relates to the first author having examined her own workplace. In this case, we would suggest that the first author's position can be seen as both a resource and a limitation. As a resource, her position made possible prolonged engagement and persistent observations, allowing her to become familiar with the research context and the topic (Lincoln & Cuba 1985). Thus, the practices and discourses of the education department under study were familiar to the main author of this study, and this familiarity could assist in understanding the prevailing culture, and in analysing and interpreting the findings.

Furthermore, because of that familiarity the author in question was able to evaluate the content and substance of the interviews in terms of how open and parallel they were, in comparison with everyday conversations, both in formal (meetings, work groups) and informal (lunch and coffee breaks) contexts. According to her estimation, the interviews were extremely open in nature: the educators did not appear in any way inhibited in discussing the department, and they brought up and problematic issues as well as positive and constructive aspects. Taylor (2001) observed that the researcher's "insider status" can be an attractive claim for the quality of the interpretation. However, she also pointed out some pitfalls. For example, the researcher's familiarity with the research context can entail the risk that his/her own dominant or prior interpretations may guide the analysis and make him/her blind to the overall richness of the data. Thus, critical reflection throughout the whole research process will be of paramount importance. In this

study the author's research diary offered an important mirror for analysing such pre-existing notions, and for looking at them critically.

In small-scale qualitative studies we can raise the question of the extent to which the findings and conclusions can be transferred to other settings. It has generally been assumed that the transferability of the findings to other contexts depends upon the similarity between the contexts (Patton 2002). Furthermore, Peräkylä (2004) suggests that the transferability or generalizability of the findings concerning social practices and discourses should be approached as an issue of *possibility*. Certain practices can be regarded as generalizable even if the practices are not actualized in completely similar ways across different settings. In the present study, the starting point was the idea that globally shared academic discourses can affect teacher educators' identity negotiation. We would therefore suggest that transferability is possible (i) to contexts in which teacher education is conducted, provided that (ii) the teacher education is research-based, with the kinds of discourses and practices that research-based education entails (Peräkylä 2004). Thus, the findings of this study might be transferable to other teacher education departments within the university sector.

Practical conclusions

This study has shown that the construction of researcher-identity in teacher education is a challenging task. Although in Finland teacher education has been conducted as research-based endeavour for several decades (Kansanen 2007; Krokfors 2007), the findings of this study imply that the researcher-identity of teacher educators is still weak. Hence we would emphasize the need to find new ways to strengthen the connection between teaching and research activities in teacher educators' work. The demand for active research as an integrated part of every teacher educator's work has been challenging, and will no doubt continue to be so. If the requirement is to be fulfilled, it will require consideration of *the widest possible range of aspects* of the social context and of individuals' agency in professional identity negotiations. Bound up with this, there is a clear need to support teacher educators' researcher-identity construction, with enhanced

possibilities for the renegotiation of teacher educators' professional identities, from teachers to researchers. And for this to happen, it is important that research should be made attractive to individual teacher educators.

All this implies that we need new ways to support teacher educators' researcher identities at different levels of their local practices. At the individual level this would mean promoting individual agency, for example through different narrative interventions at work (e.g. Hänninen & Eteläpelto 2008). This would be important because renegotiation of professional identities, especially in human-centred professions, requires the ongoing re-interpretation of experiences, with deep-level transformations in individuals' understanding of their professional selves (e.g. Beijaard et al. 2004). In addition, teacher educators should have opportunities to develop their researcher competencies, for example by participating in methodological courses, with the updating of competencies that such courses can provide. Another suggestion concerns the nature of the research conducted within teacher education. At work community level this would mean that different subject-matter groups could be seen not only as resources for developing pedagogical practices and knowledge, but also as resources for *shared research efforts* and spaces for research-identity negotiations. Furthermore we would emphasize the importance of intensive, *small-group research teams*. At the departmental level it would be important to support structures for boundary-crossing between subject matter groups, with shared practices for common research efforts and activities.

In this study we have examined the agency of teacher educators through the *shared* patterns of their talk in relation to the social context (with its possibilities and constraints). Hence, the study does not shed light on individual variations, involving for example differences in subjects' positions (modified, for example, by interpersonal power relations). Thus, there is a clear need for further in-depth studies of teacher educators' agency and identity construction – studies that would allow us to better theorize individual agency among teacher educators, in relation to the social context of teacher education, and including the wider framework of societal challenges and changing work conditions. One further major question for

future studies will be how the new managerial models that have been widely adopted in educational organizations and universities may tend to influence teacher educators' agency in their professional identity negotiations and their work.

Transcription Notation

[…]	Material omitted by the authors
[text]	Material changed by the authors for the sake of anonymity
[text]	Material added by the authors for the sake of clarity

Acknowledgements

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Table1. Teacher educators' agency at different levels of teacher education practices

	Teacher educators' agency in terms of teacher and researcher	
Level of teacher education practices	*Teacher*	*Researcher*
Individual level	Total ownership of one's own teaching: "I can do whatever I want."	Lack of agency: "some day in the future" talk; research as a hobby.
Work-community level (subject-matter group)	Community as a resource for learning: commitment to and identification with the subject matter and subject group.	In the data, no discussion at all concerning research activity.
Department level (teacher education dept.)	Categorizations and labelling according to subject-matter: "frozen" identities.	No time or resources for research. No shared research activities. Work plan full of face-to-face teaching.
Organizational level (university)	Other university departments as resources. Administration of the university seen as a threat – strategies for resistance.	Accountability as subjugation.