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Seeking New Perspectives on the Development of Teacher Education – A Study of the Finnish Context

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Introduction

There is a global consensus that teacher education must be improved and resources and obstacles to developing teacher education need to be elaborated if it is to meet the challenges of the 21st century (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Futrell, 2008; Korthagen, 2010; Murray, 2008; Niemi, 2002). Considerable variations exist in the implementation, pedagogy, and structure of teacher education worldwide, with differences also in the level of involvement of national governments. Yet despite these differences, the field of teacher education has consistently been an object of political debate. The aims at national level have included developing teacher education, promoting the work of teachers, safeguarding a socially coherent society, and maintaining the national cultural heritage (Cochran-Smith, 2009; Liston, Borko, & Whitcomb, 2008; Murray, 2008). However, questions arise as to whether teachers are being educated for a knowledge-based global society, or whether teacher education in its current form is an outmoded relic from a long-departed industrial era (Futrell, 2008; Wang, Lin, Spalding, Odell, & Klecka, 2011). On a global level, developing teacher education and altering well-established teacher education programs appears to be a slow and difficult process (e.g., Fullan, 2001; Gorodetsky, Barak, & Harari, 2007; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Margolin, 2007; Niemi, 2002; Peck, Gallucci, Sloan, & Lippincott, 2009; Smith, 2003).

In conjunction with calls for reform, education is increasingly becoming subject to economic and managerial pressures (Ball, 2012; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Kivirauma et al., 2012; Meyer, 2002; Taubman, 2009). One prevailing global trend has been the enactment of neoliberal economic policies and the adoption of New Public Management (NPM) principles. This has led to increased global competition, market-oriented reforms, and restructuring programs that have forced educational organizations to adopt new, strategy-oriented, managerial models (Ball, 2012; Lindblad & Goodson, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). In seeking to achieve maximum profitability, educational organizations are increasingly required to emphasize strategy-oriented control and accountability, which has involved centrally imposed standards and new systems of monitoring and evaluation (Dent, van Gestel, & Teelken, 2007; Hudson, 2007; Meyer, 2002; Moos, 2005; Moos et al., 2008).

Teacher education organizations are no exception; they too must transform their organizational practices and improve their productivity (Knight et al., 2012; Reid, 2011), and are under pressure to be flexible and creative in transforming their strategies and practices in order to survive. Individual teacher educators have had to recognize the effects of increased competition and demands for accountability, while external evaluations have underlined the need for greater productivity in teaching work, including the production of published research articles (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Robinson & McMillan, 2006; Sohlberg et al., 2010). Furthermore, neoliberal economic policies and new public management principles have led not just to increased control over educators' work but also – as argued, for example, by Murray (2008) – to an erosion of academic professionalism. Overall, it appears that in the global context of market competition, the professional independence of teachers and educators, and a previous culture of trust, are being replaced by ideals of accountability, efficacy, and productivity (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). This means that teacher educators

now have to engage in continuous professional learning to reshape their work practices and renegotiate their professional identities.

Although a general picture of the challenges to developing teacher education has formed, we still know little about the professional learning of teacher educators or how this intertwines with their professional identity negotiation. Furthermore, little is known about how these aspects are resourced and constrained by organizational practices, discourses, and structures (Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen, 2007; Murray & Harrison, 2008; Robinson & McMillan, 2006). There are gaps in our understanding of how teacher educators' professional learning is connected to their professional identity, how this is resourced and constrained, and the relationship between educators' professional learning and the organizational development of teacher education. Thus, research is required to shed light on the interrelationship between teacher educators' professional learning, the slow development of teacher education, and the reasons why change is so difficult to implement. In focusing on this issue, there is a need to elaborate on the most critical resources and obstacles to developing teacher education.

Therefore, in this study we investigate resources and obstacles pertaining to teacher educators' professional learning and organizational development in the context of academic and university-based teacher education in Finland. Based on the findings concerning the resources and obstacles, we suggest new solutions to promote continuous learning and the development of teacher education at an individual and collective level. In addition, we question the challenges emerging from the academic context, with the aim of contributing to the discussion on the nature of research suitable for academic teacher education. To investigate these issues we utilize our four previous empirical studies, which focused on different aspects of individual and organizational learning in the context of a Finnish teacher education (Hökkä, Eteläpelto, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2010; Hökkä, Eteläpelto, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2012; Hökkä, Rasku-Puttonen, & Eteläpelto, 2008; Vähäsantanen, Hökkä,

Eteläpelto, Rasku-Puttonen & Littleton, 2008). The previous studies illustrated separate resources and obstacles to teacher educators' professional learning, but did not provide a comprehensive, overarching picture of these, nor the relations between them. By utilizing the findings of the four previous empirical studies focusing on separate resources and obstacles, in this study – based on the meta-analysis of the findings (e.g. Sandelowski & Barroso, 2006; Timulak, 2009) − we provide a novel multilevel synthesis in terms of the compilation of the resources and obstacles at individual, work-community and organizational and levels. Such a comprehensive understanding is pivotal if we wish to find sustainable solutions for developing teacher education. We argue that enhancing teacher educators' continuous professional learning, and the development of teacher education, requires developing teacher education concurrently at the individual, work community, and organizational levels. In addition, there is a need to construct multiple couplings between these levels.

Theoretically, we adopt the idea that individual and organizational developments are intertwined and should be studied as mutually constitutive. Sociocultural theory offers a fruitful framework to examine these issues, and in the following sub-section we present the main theoretical outlines.

Sociocultural Lenses as a Framework

The theoretical starting point of the research largely drew on Vygotsky's notions of human learning and development. Thus, we understand learning and change primarily in terms of socially and culturally mediated meaning construction, taking place through participation in shared communities of practice (Herrenkohl & Wertsch, 1999; van Huizen et al., 2005; Peck et al., 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). The sociocultural approach adopted here sees human action as mediated by language and other symbolic tools found within specific cultural contexts. Consequently, priority is given to the social context and cultural tools that shape the

construction of human understanding and action. In this way, what individuals believe and how they act is shaped by historical, cultural, and social conditions reflected in mediational tools. As a preeminent mediational tool, language is of paramount importance (e.g., Rogoff, 2003; Wertsch, del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995).

Participation within socioculturally constructed situational practices is regarded as a key factor in professional learning and organizational development (Boreham & Morgan, 2004; Brown & Duguid, 2000; Easterby-Smith, 1997; Wenger, 1998). Effective professional learning is understood to require conditions conducive to developing a dialectical relationship between professional and organizational development (Day & Gu, 2007). Individual and organizational development are seen as intertwined and mutually constitutive. Thus, the focus is on examining the multiple relations between the individual and social aspects of learning, and on understanding the processes through which individual and organizational learning are constructed (Herrenkohl, 2008; Imants, Wubbels, & Vermunt, 2013; Peck et al., 2009).

Individual and organizational learning will preeminently involve (i) the participation of individuals in shared meaning construction within communities of practice, and (ii) interaction between different communities of practice, involving common meaning construction, both within and beyond organizational boundaries (Wenger, 1998). The notion of organizational development in the context of teacher education includes ways of promoting continuous learning and developing teacher education practices (see also Gallucci, 2008).

Recent critics of the sociocultural approach have claimed that it adopts too narrow understanding of learning, placing too much emphasis on social and contextual factors (e.g., Billett, 2006a; Cairns, 2011). Therefore, we have taken a broader view of the sociocultural perspective, seeing learning not merely as an entity determined by social and cultural factors,

but also as a phenomenon involving professional-identity construction (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013a). Identity is seen as constructed through a relationship that intertwines the social context, the individual's interaction with others, and his/her interpretations of these experiences (Day & Gu, 2007; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010). In addressing professional identity, identity negotiation is perceived to be an ongoing, socioculturally imbued process that occurs in a mutually constitutive relationship between the individual actor and the work context (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Lasky, 2005; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). This negotiation is a dynamic process, one that connects social suggestions (coming from the social context) with individuals' expectations. The integrative dynamic works in such a way that those concerned make sense of their work and themselves as professionals (Beijaard et al., 2004; Cohen, 2010). Professional identity encompasses individuals' commitments, orientations, values, ethical principles, and identifications (Vähäsantanen et al., 2008); in other words, it involves what individuals understand as being of most importance in their work.

Professional identities are constructed through participation in the practices and discourses of work organizations. Workplaces offer certain socially shared resources and constraints, within which individuals negotiate who they are, and who they might become, as professional actors (Billett, 2006a; Watson, 2008). During this process, organizational norms and instructions may be appropriated, ignored, or resisted (Fenwick & Somerville, 2006; Wells, 2007). This acting and negotiating requires the practice of professional agency, with professionals having to look at themselves and their previous identity commitments, identifications, ethical norms, and competencies. In general, the practice of individual agency implies that subjects are active directors of their own lives and have the power to influence matters concerning their own living (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013b; Hitlin & Elder, 2007). Consequently, we witness professional

agency being practiced when professional subjects and/or communities exert influence, make choices, and take stances in ways that affect their work and/or their professional identities (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Professional agency is always exercised for certain purposes and within certain historically formed sociocultural and material circumstances, and it is constrained and resourced by these circumstances. The practice of professional agency is closely linked to professional subjects' work-related identities, comprising their professional and ethical commitments, ideals, motivations, interests, and goals (Billett & Smith, 2006; Eteläpelto et al., 2013b; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2011; Vähäsantanen, 2013; Watson, 2008).

Methodologically this study utilizes a discursive approach, in the sense of organizational discourses being seen as framing the social context in which individuals exercise their professional agency within their local workplace practices. These discourses make possible certain socially available subject positions, which act as both resources and obstacles in renegotiating professional identities (Lewis et al., 2007; Reynolds, Wetherell, & Taylor, 2007; Wetherell, 2005). Thus, the negotiation of teacher educators' professional agency is seen to occur within organizational discourses and local work practices. In the following sub-section, we provide a description of the local context of this study in Finnish teacher education.

Finnish Teacher Education as the Research Context

As a socio-historical context for teacher education, Finnish teacher education is unique. Established in 1863, the education of primary and secondary school teachers has been organized at the university level since 1971. In 1979, it was decided that teacher education programs would take from four to five years to complete, and that the basic qualification for both primary and secondary school teachers would be the master's degree (Niemi & Jakku-

Sihvonen, 2006). By contrast, teacher education programs in most other countries are graded at a lower (bachelor's) level; it is common for the teaching qualification for lower secondary education to be at the bachelor's level, with the master's level required only for upper secondary education.

Together with the uniqueness outlined above, one important feature of Finnish teacher education has been the strong emphasis on a research-based curriculum, within which the study of research methods and the writing of a master's thesis are pivotal to the professional competencies of prospective teachers. Furthermore, all courses in the program are integrated with research; prospective primary school teachers have educational sciences as their major subject, and teacher education studies also provide direct access to doctoral studies (Kansanen, 2007; Krokfors, 2007).

This means that for several decades the objective of Finnish teacher education has been to develop an academically high standard of education for prospective teachers. This approach, with its strong research emphasis, has aimed to train autonomous and reflective teachers capable of adopting a research-oriented attitude toward their work. Therefore, teachers are expected to take an analytical approach and to develop their teaching and learning environments continuously and systematically. This also means that teachers as professionals have been required to take an active role in decisions affecting education, and not merely implement decisions made by others (Krokfors et al., 2006; Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006).

The strong academic orientation of teacher education is also reflected in the status of teachers in comprehensive education. An unusual feature of teacher education in Finland has been the large number of people applying to teacher education programs, and the intense competition for places. Only about 10 to 15% of applicants are accepted into teacher

education programs, and this applies to class teachers in particular. This increases the likelihood that student teachers will be suitable for the profession, highly motivated, and possess superior academic skills (Kansanen, 2007; Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006).

The academically based teacher education described above has also imposed high standards on teacher educators. They are considered academic professionals, and to be appointed for example as a senior lecturer one must have a doctoral degree and a high level of pedagogical competence. Given that research-based teacher education has been practiced in Finland for longer than in any other country, the Finnish system offers an interesting context in which to examine the professional learning and identities of teacher educators in relation to teacher education practices, discourses, and cultures.

The Finnish teacher education system has aroused considerable international interest in recent years due to its excellent performance in international assessments (e.g., Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Sahlberg, 2010). Particular note has been taken of the impressive learning outcomes of Finnish 15-year-olds in Pisa testing, in which Finland emerged as the top country, or earned a place in the top three countries, in 2000, 2003, 2006, and 2009. The general agreement is that high scores in international assessments and achievement tests are largely the result of the high quality of teachers and teacher education (e.g., Niemi, 2011; Sahlberg, 2011). Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that the Finnish teacher education system is "finished" or complete, since this would be disastrous in terms of maintaining high-quality teacher education in the future. In times of new demands arising from enormous transformations in societies, there is a need to be aware of potential obstacles to teacher educators' continuous professional learning and developing teacher education.

Research Aims and Questions

To face the future challenges of teacher education there is a need for a more elaborated understanding of the resources for, and constraints in, developing teacher education. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the discussion on the major resources and obstacles to developing teacher education and finding novel solutions to overcome the obstacles. Our main aim was to investigate the resources and obstacles relating to teacher educators' professional learning and the organizational development of teacher education. The overarching research question of this study was defined as follows: What kind of resources and obstacles were perceived as most important for professional learning and developing teacher education? The sub-questions were formulated as follows:

1. What kind of resources and obstacles were perceived as important for teacher educators' individual professional learning?
2. How were these resources and obstacles manifested in teacher educators' professional identity negotiations and the practice of professional agency?
3. What kind of constraints were perceived at the level of organizational development?

Based on the findings we aim to provide practical conclusions and possible approaches to overcome the obstacles, and find new perspectives on the development of teacher education.

Method

In this study we applied qualitative meta-analysis (e.g. Sandelowski & Barroso, 2006; Schreiber, Crooks, & Stern, 1997; Timulak, 2007; 2009) in re-analyzing the main findings of our four previous (primary) empirical studies focusing on separate resources and obstacles to teacher educators' professional learning and organizational development (Hökkä et al., 2008; 2010; 2012; Vähäsantanen et al., 2008). These four primary studies utilized the same empirical data, focusing on different aspects of individual, work community, and work

organizational level resources and obstacles gathered in one Finnish Teacher education department. The four previous studies were different also in terms of applying different methods of analysis (thematic analysis, qualitative content analysis, discursive analysis). Thus, they revealed different levels of resources and obstacles, but did not give a comprehensive picture of these and the relations between these.

By utilizing qualitative meta-analysis our aim was to conduct a secondary qualitative analysis of primary qualitative findings (e.g. Timulak, 2009), and provide a more comprehensive description of the challenges in developing teacher education both at an individual and collective level. The more comprehensive description was sought through treating the main findings of the primary studies as data and focusing on their ambiguities, differences, and commonalities. In the meta-analysis we first extracted the findings on resources and obstacles revealed in the four previous studies. After this, we constructed a compilation of the major resources and obstacles, and categorized them to individual, work community and organizational levels according to the research questions. By categorizing and comparing the main findings of the primary studies, together with examples and data extracts, we were able to establish meta-analytic categories for teacher educators' individual professional learning, professional identity and agency, and organizational development.

We conducted the four primary studies in one of the biggest and oldest Finnish teacher education departments (with 90–100 employees, comprising about nine subject-matter groups with between three and nine teacher educators in each) within a large multidisciplinary Finnish university. We gathered the main data for the primary studies in 2005 through in-depth, open-ended interviews with eight teacher educators, selected purposefully as key informants representing different categories of age, academic status, teaching subjects, and time spent working in the department. There was at least one representative from all of the professional groups present in the department: assistants,

university teachers, lecturers, and professors. There were also representatives of both permanent and temporary personnel.

The interviews were open-ended, with the aim to remain as open as possible to the participants' perceptions and accounts. However, an interview guide, including a list of questions to be talked through in the course of an interview, was utilized (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Patton, 2002). The research 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 the work.

Complementing the data was a research diary kept by the first author between 2002 and 2006, while she was working in the teacher education department in question. The author's dual position as practitioner and researcher was both a challenge and an advantage. It required continuous critical reflection during the entire research process, and especially in analyzing the data. However, such a position allowed the opportunity to consider the implementation of teacher education closely, and helped in understanding the culture of the teacher education department, with the chance to identify and define the aspects most worthy of study. The issue concerning the researcher's own position in the department, with its possible effects on the study and the trustworthiness of the findings, was one we considered carefully during the research process (Hökkä et al., 2010; 2012).

In the analysis of the interview-data we focused on the teacher educators' individual perceptions and experiences. However, we looked to identify common elements in different interviews, aiming to arrive at general characterizations from the interview data. In analyzing the data we applied thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2002), and discursive analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The analysis was performed on cross-case bases, meaning that the answers from different people were grouped together to form common categories or to examine a variety of perspectives on central issues (Patton, 2002). The analysis focused on the educators' experiences on a general and shared level, rather than, for example, on the level of individual backgrounds. This was also necessary for ethical reasons, to ensure the anonymity of those interviewed.

Findings

In the following sub-sections we present the findings of the research questions in the order in which they are presented above. We first describe findings relating to individual-level resources and obstacles to professional learning (research question 1), and then explain how the obstacles and resources are manifested in terms of professional identity negotiations and the practice of professional agency (research question 2). Finally, we present the kinds of constraints identifiable in organizational development (research question 3).

Professional Learning − Resources and Obstacles

The teacher educators' professional learning was closely connected to their everyday work practices, and the educators indicated that they were free to develop their work, working practices, and teaching as they wished (Hökkä et al., 2008). Professional learning was achieved through the planning and implementation of the teaching and of various development projects connected, for example, to improving teaching methods or to the implementation of the curriculum. The educators were extremely satisfied with the resources offered by the department and the university, which provided them with opportunities to pursue their own education and implement their projects. Furthermore, they were able to

engage actively with local, national, and international networks, and to form connections and networks independently. They highlighted the freedom to participate in different professional networks and collaborative groups (e.g., local schools) as an important resource for their individual professional learning.

Taken together, the research data supported certain emerging notions that view professional learning as integrated with ongoing participation and everyday work practices (c.f., Billett, 2006a). In human-centered creative professions, such as academia or teaching, in which the work demands personal commitment and continuous learning, these issues have been seen as pivotal (Hökkä et al., 2008). Furthermore, the professional learning of teacher educators can be seen as beneficial to the whole field of teacher education (and further, to education in general). Continuous learning is likely to enhance professional growth and maintain professional interest (Smith, 2003), and the research provided clear indications of this. The teacher educators were deeply interested in their work and in developing it to a higher level. Moreover, the data indicated that the resources and possibilities for continuous professional learning had a major influence on the educators' commitment to their work. In fact, having ample resources for professional development was considered one of the most rewarding aspects of the teacher educators' work, and an important factor contributing to their commitment to their work (Vähäsantanen et al., 2008).

With regards barriers to individual professional learning, the picture that emerged from the teacher educators' accounts was not entirely consistent with the common finding that the lack of time is a prime obstacle (e.g., Smith, 2003). The empirical findings of this study suggest that although a lack of time was problematic for educators, it is not viewed as a preeminent problem in professional learning. Instead, the main obstacle to professional learning turned out to be the limited, or even non-existent, collaboration among educators within the department. This aspect produced, in particular, barriers to collaboration across

different subject-matter groups, and between subject-matter groups and educational science. The boundaries underlined the differences between communities of practice, and emerged as barriers to mutual collaboration, shared meaning construction, and learning.

Furthermore, the educators found it difficult to apply their own expertise for the benefit of the department, as they felt unable to share it safely with others. It seemed that the educators tended to shelter their own ideas from the rest of the organization, being afraid that their ideas would be "shot down". As one teacher educator put it:

> We have a bit of a tradition of shooting things down. When somebody develops something new, then in general the idea takes off in some way... There's a kind of disparagement, people clamming shut or questioning the whole thing. So you don't get anything like 'well done, you've done really good work'.

Thus, the situation ran counter to recent notions of shared practices and meaning construction as prerequisites for professional learning (e.g., Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Wenger, 1998).

However, what was promising for the future was the educators' strong desire to collaborate, negotiate, and exchange ideas with colleagues within the department (Hökkä et al., 2008). Every interviewee viewed colleagues as an important resource for professional learning, and would have liked more collaboration with her/his fellow educators. The following sub-section further illustrates the resources and challenges of teacher educators' professional learning in terms of professional identity and the practice of professional agency.

Professional Identity and Professional Agency

The data analysis showed that the teacher educators identified very strongly with their roles and mission as teachers (Hökkä et al., 2008; 2012). Together with demonstrating commitment to the teaching mission, the educators identified very strongly with the subject

matter they taught. They mostly described their prime professional challenge as developing their own subject matter and its pedagogies, and establishing its relevance to their students, together with ensuring they had the skills to implement the goals of the discipline in question. One teacher educator described this as follows:

> I do have a mission in my teaching. I think that the subject matter I teach is so extremely important that I think that my mission is to convince all the others to understand its importance. And also to help our student-teachers to regard the subject matter neutrally and to help them to be able teach it properly. The mission is to make visible and reveal the diversity of my subject matter.

The finding is in line with other recent studies concerning teacher educators' professional identity. For example, Robinson and McMillan (2006) noticed that teacher educators were extremely committed to their teaching mission and pedagogical roles, and that when given more flexibility and time they would often prefer to use it to protect their teaching duties rather than, for example, undertake research. Similarly, Leslie (2002) showed that university staff members often favor teaching, even when the rewards are higher for those involved in research. This also seems to be the situation in the addressed Finnish academic context.

Our study indicated that the teacher educators' agency in terms of making choices and influencing their work and professional identity was strong (Vähäsantanen et al., 2008). Teacher educators made it clear that they could plan, develop, and implement their teaching according to their own intentions and wishes. This was manifested as the opportunity for them to work according to their individual professional orientations, to negotiate the content of their work, and to influence work community and organizational issues. Such matters were also seen as a natural part of being an academic professional. At the organizational level, the educators' professional agency was strong in terms of acting on and influencing shared issues

within the department. However, this influence required familiarity with prevailing practices and discourses. The educators had the chance to negotiate, and even outmaneuver, the social suggestions offered by the university's central administration if these suggestions threatened the implementation of their teaching work. Here is how one teacher educator described this resistance:

> 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.

In teacher education studies globally, the issue of educators as researchers has been raised and their dual role as practitioners and academic scholars highlighted (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2005; Murray et al., 2009). Our study supported these notions, showing that teacher educators' agency within researcher-identity negotiations was contested and weak (Hökkä et al., 2012). Furthermore, the connection between the teacher- and researcher-identity appeared fragile, and for the most part teaching and research were described as two separate functions. One teacher educator described his thoughts about research as follows:

> There is no collaboration in research…and any research that I manage to do is totally connected with my own materials.

In accordance with this, Chetty and Lubben (2010) have presented findings indicating that teacher educators often see the role of researcher as unfamiliar, and sometimes as unnecessary or even threatening. Similarly, Murray, Czerniawski, and Barber (2011) found

that teacher educators might resist the idea of research engagement and of having an identity as an academic. Thus, teacher educators tend to identify themselves foremost as teachers rather than academic scholars (Beck & Young, 2005). However, similar finding is somewhat 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).

In considering problems associated with professional identity renegotiations and the practice of professional agency, the findings showed that major obstacles emerged from the social positioning taking place in work context. Our study demonstrated that teacher educators' agency in terms of participation in shared work practice was weak and fragile, while it appeared that the teacher educators' renegotiation of professional identity was problematic due to the labels put on them by other teacher educators and the work community (Hökkä et al., 2008; Vähäsantanen et al., 2008). In the teacher educators' work community, it seemed difficult or even impossible for them to be regarded as anything other than representatives of stable positions, determined mainly by the subject matter they taught, as one teacher educator indicated:

> People here 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.

The stable positions noted here relate closely to problems in the renegotiation of professional identity from a wider perspective. Instead, the educators were positioned mainly as protectors of their own subject matter (Hökkä et al., 2010). In addition, there were other major obstacles at the work organizational level.

Obstacles to Organizational-level Development

The third research question related to the kind of constraints perceived at the level of organizational development. Overall, the study showed that teacher educators found organizational development to be a slow and difficult process (Hökkä et al., 2008). There was a significant discrepancy between the teacher educators' own professional learning and how they perceived organizational learning. Although the department offered plentiful resources for individual professional learning, it was seen as stuck in its traditional ways and almost impossible to change.

Similarly, studies elsewhere have shown that collaboration and shared practices between educators are important, not only for enhancing education but also for organizational development. Peck et al. (2009) explained that collective negotiation and interaction is crucial in attempting organizational or programmatic change within teacher education; changes could only be realized through collective negotiation and action. According to our study, collective negotiations and actions between teacher educators and between different subject-matter groups were indeed rare. Instead, there were substantial barriers between different subject-matter groups that hindered collaboration and boundary crossing, and impeded shared meaning construction between these groups (Hökkä et al., 2008; Vähäsantanen et al., 2008). Furthermore, teacher educators' strong individual agency impeded organizational development and community learning because the individual agency was mainly manifested as securing one's own autonomy and implementing teaching according to one's own

intentions and interests. In addition, there was competition between subject-matter groups for resources, study credits within the curriculum, teaching resources, and contact lessons. This served to hamper collaboration and collective negotiation between subject-matter groups, and hindered organizational development. The following extract gives an example how one teacher educator described the competition between subject-matter groups:

> Well, I've been following this curriculum development a bit from the side…I mean I haven't had to get involved in these school subject studies to be more or less fighting over these issues.

When considering organizational-level obstacles to developing teacher education, the study revealed that one important constraint might lie in the prevailing hegemonic organizational discourse manifested especially in the reforming of the curriculum. The results showed that the prevailing organizational discourse was the competition discourse, implying a deep struggle for resources between different subject-matter groups (Hökkä et al., 2010). It appeared that this might impede changes and maintain the traditional ways of understanding and implementing the curriculum, which can be taken as an indicator of the slowness of change in teacher education and of opposition to radical reforms (Korthagen et al., 2006). In this case, even curriculum development can remain superficial, a matter of mere "window dressing". This means that although the written curriculum may be changed, the lived and realized curriculum will continue to be implemented much as before. Here is an example of how one teacher educator described this:

> Here there is a kind of horror scenario that means that things just roll on as they did before... that the outer trappings of the curriculum change but the implementation and the content of the curriculum stays the same. The changes are

> so slow and tiny that too many generations of students will just slide on by in the same old way.

More promising was that the teacher educators described their future expectations and hopes concerning teacher education in terms of reform discourse. This underlined the teacher educators' active role in developing schools, and society as a whole, through research-based education. The following extract provides an example of reform discourse:

> In my teaching I bear in mind that I must open up to our teacher students a research-based, scientific point of view for looking at what the school really is when you go there, and also for situations when they go into the school and see the kinds of resources the scientific community provides for facing new situations, the kinds there's no ready formula for.

Thus, it would appear there is a readiness for fundamental reforms in teacher education. In considering the future, it seems one critical concern is how to achieve a balance between external demands for change and the teacher educators' own ideas of the essential reform suggestions that could promote the development of teacher education.

To sum up, our findings have demonstrated different levels of resources for, and constraints in, teacher educators' professional learning, identity renegotiation, and the practice of professional agency. Furthermore, we have highlighted obstacles to organizational development in teacher education. In the following sub-section we consider the implications of these findings for discovering new perspectives to overcome the obstacles.

Discussion and Conclusion

Seeking New Perspectives to Overcome the Obstacles

We have examined the resources and obstacles affecting teacher educators' professional learning and organizational development in an academic context within a particular Finnish teacher education department. The aim was to create a comprehensive picture of the resources and critical obstacles, and based on the findings suggest new perspectives to discover why changes in teacher education occur so slowly, and why the changes are so difficult to implement.

The findings of this study point to considering the following three aspects if we wish to promote continuous professional learning and the development of teacher education:

- obstacles to renegotiating professional identity;
- internal competition and a lack of boundary crossing between subject matters within teacher education departments;
- tensions between strong individual agency and organizational development.

In the following sections we discuss these three aspects in terms of how they can be addressed to find new solutions to develop teacher education.

Obstacles to renegotiating professional identity. The findings suggest there is an imbalance between teacher educators' professional identity and the social demands imposed on them. Teacher educators have recently experienced increased pressures due to changes in society and the university sector, requiring the continuous renegotiation of their professional identity. However, it seems their main commitment remains to their identity as teachers and to protecting their own teaching mission and subject matter. Teacher educators showed strong commitment to, and identification with, the subject matter they taught. The educators' professional agency was strong in negotiating a teacher-identity and in protecting their own pedagogical power and resources. By contrast, the negotiation of their researcher-identity was

weak and fragile. Furthermore, certain sociocultural aspects of teacher education seemed to limit the renegotiation of the educators' professional identity construction at the work community level. Indeed, the study suggested that the work community did not offer resources for the renegotiation of professional identity. On the contrary, the work community positioned teacher educators within fairly stable, yet restricted, positions, mainly according to the subject matter they taught.

One major obstacle at the organizational level was the hegemonic discourse (i.e., the prevailing way of talking about shared issues in the community) identified as competition discourse, which positioned teacher educators as combatants and protectors of their own subject matter (Hökkä et al., 2010). This, too, seemed to constrain the renegotiation of professional identities among the educators, and all this suggests that different levels of obstacles exist when renegotiating professional identities among teacher educators.

In seeking new perspectives to overcome obstacles to the renegotiation of researcher identity, and to support stronger research identity, we would suggest addressing the following issues. First, different subject-matter groups should 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 negotiation. Furthermore, it would be important to create and support structures for boundary crossing between subject matter groups to encourage innovative and intensive small-group research teams. Second, since the work of many teacher educators is implemented largely through practice-based principles, there is a need to support teacher educators' researcher competencies. Thus, educators should have opportunities to develop such competencies, for example by participating in methodological courses and academic conferences. Finally, we see that research should be an inseparable element of the teacher educator's everyday work, not just the privilege of a few researchers within a department. By adopting an active, research-oriented, attitude towards their work,

teacher educators are likely to learn to develop their teaching and wider teacher education. This means that the work of academic teacher educators as researchers should be understood more broadly than simply accounting the number of conventional research publications they produce. As Murray (2008) argues, there are numerous forms of involvement as an academic scholar, such as participation in research group work, action research, enquiries into personal practice, writing books and teaching materials, and involvement in national and international research projects. In the field of teacher education, the recent accountability culture and the habit of defining research narrowly and merely as the production of published articles should be opposed (Hökkä et al., 2012; Murray, 2008).

Internal competition and a lack of boundary crossing. Recently, organizations have been required to position themselves as social learning systems and engage in broader learning systems to be successful in their practices (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). In addition, there is a need to strengthen networking opportunities and collaboration with other partners and stakeholders (e.g., Grangeat & Gray, 2008; Murray et al., 2009). In teacher education organization, a lack of collaboration has been seen as a threat, and as tending to diminish the quality of teacher education (e.g., Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). Our study emphasized the importance of collaboration among teacher educators *inside* the teacher education department. One major obstacle for both individual and organizational development within the department appeared to be the striking lack of collaboration between different subject-matter groups, and between subject-matter groups and educational science. Collaboration between subject-matter groups and between teacher educators is a potential resource for individual learning and organizational development. Boundary crossing could offer important possibilities for learning and development, giving opportunities to communicate, share perspectives, and construct meaning (Wenger et al., 2002). However, the

data from the department in question suggests that this potential may not sufficiently be exploited in teacher education.

Going beyond the mere lack of boundary crossing between different subject-matter groups, it appeared that relations between the groups were actually competitive in nature. Internal competition for resources and social appreciation strengthens the barriers between subject-matter groups and hinders collaboration. In the department in question, such internal competition between the subject-matter groups (and the educators belonging to them) created obstacles to sharing practices and creating common knowledge; thus, it created obstacles to learning both at the individual and organizational level.

In seeking new perspectives to overcome the obstacles caused by the lack of boundary crossing between the subject-matter groups, we suggest implementing teacher education through collaboration-based practices rather than through strict division into different subject-matter groups. This kind of reform from a subject-matter-centered culture to a more holistic and collaborative culture in teacher education could be supported through the three levels of intervention presented in the following sub-section.

Tensions between professional agency and organizational development. There is research evidence that when teachers have strong professional agency they are more committed to their work and participate more in the development and sharing of work practices (e.g., Imants, et al. 2013; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2011; Vähäsantanen, 2013). This study partly supported these results, and underlined the ways in which strong professional agency can support professional development and workplace learning (Hökkä et al., 2008; Vähäsantanen et al., 2008). However, the findings revealed another facet of professional agency. It appeared that strong individual agency could, in fact, be an obstacle for organizational development in that it limits collaborative practices, impedes cultural

change, and hampers organizational learning. We found that teacher educators used their strong individual agency to protect their individual ways of working and safeguard the resources of their own subject matter in curriculum development negotiations. The educators' strong commitment to their subject matter, paired with their strong agency in teacher identity negotiations, seemed to create powerful obstacles to collaboration and boundary crossing between subject-matter groups, to shared meaning construction, and to organizational development.

Nevertheless, the teacher educators' hopes for organizational change were high, especially with regard to developing the curriculum and implementing teacher education. This was revealed by the educators' expectations for collective and shared work practices (Hökkä et al., 2008) and by the reform discourse (Hökkä et al., 2010). However, socioculturally developed structural and institutional practices and discourses were so strong that they tended to work against the professional agency of those teacher educators who hoped for reforms in teacher education.

All of this indicates that professional agency – in terms of the relationship between individual and organizational development – is not adequately understood. This study suggests that to overcome the obstacles emerging from the intertwining relationship between individual learning and organizational change there is a need to understand professional learning and development not just as something embedded within the individual actor, but also as an organizational-level phenomenon. Thus, this requires a new, three-level, understanding of obstacles in developing teacher education, which would mean that individuals, work communities, and organizations could continuously develop and renew their practices and strategies. Hence, for successful and sustainable changes in teacher education we need practical interventions at the individual, work community and organizational levels.

At the individual level, this could mean promoting teacher educators' professional agency through different work-identity coaching interventions (Hänninen & Eteläpelto, 2008; Mahlakaarto, 2010). This kind of identity-level intervention (identity workshops) utilizes various activity-based and creative methods that aim to empower individuals to become aware of themselves and their relation to changing work life and society. It can help individuals reshape their professional identities, adopt new work roles and identity positions, and strengthen the possibility of them affecting their working conditions and environment in a constructive way (Mahlakaarto, 2010).

At work community and organizational levels, the key question is how to find innovative ways to implement teacher education by involving collaboration and boundary crossing between different work groups within and beyond organizational boundaries. One option is through community and organizational-level interventions, which aim to make visible and amplify the shared understanding of official and unofficial power relations, discourses, and practices within organizations (Kalliola & Nakari, 2007). Through revealing these often hidden organizational discourses and practices it is possible to build new shared understandings, work practices, and strategies. This kind of work community and organizational-level interventions can be realized, for example, by utilizing the dialogical work conference method (Gustavsen, 2001). The goal of this method is to find shared understanding through small group and joint group dialogical discussions, and through this understanding to generate decisions that provide a platform for joint action. The final aim is to make concrete plans for development and change, and to agree how to assess and evaluate the process of changing words into concrete action (Kalliola & Mahlakaarto, 2011). These kinds of interventions could help to enhance collaboration and boundary crossing at the work community level, and develop and renew strategies and work practices at organizational level.

Furthermore, to support the development and changes in teacher education it is pivotal to understand the importance of connections and couplings between these three levels. Levels and structures do not create the change, people do, meaning it is important to focus on relationships, communication, and interaction between individuals working in different groups and at different levels. Therefore, in developing teacher education organizations, priority should be given to the creation of social links and communication between different working groups at different levels (Hökkä & Vähäsantanen, 2013).

In developing teacher education and creating couplings within teacher education organizations, the role of management and educational leaders is crucial. It is largely their responsibility to implement the strategic decisions and transformations, and to meet and deal with the resultant reactions and feelings of the personnel. We argue that educational leaders are currently in need of time and space for their own identity work to confront the many and multifaceted demands placed on them. This means our final suggestion to overcome the obstacles in developing teacher education is to develop an identity-coaching program for educational leaders. In these work-identity interventions (leader-identity workshops), educational leaders should be not only empowered to reshape their own professional identities but also empowered to support the learning and identity processes of their personnel. Secondly, leader-identity workshops are needed to give tools to increase collaboration and create the couplings between different actors at different levels in the organization. Thirdly, educational leaders need to be supported to create new understandings of the complex processes involved in developing teacher education organizations.

The Need to Study and to Promote Teacher Educators' Individual and Collective Agency at Work

It is clear that in a rapidly changing and increasingly knowledge-dependent world, teacher education must develop to respond to the challenges of the 21st century. This cannot be achieved by drawing on traditional cultures and individual means of implementing education (Fullan, 2001; Korthagen et al., 2006; Niemi, 2003; Smith, 2003). Nor is it achievable through global economic competition and market-oriented thinking (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Murray et al., 2011; Smith, 2011). Instead, there is a need to develop teacher education continuously in such a way that (i) individual teacher educators can learn, renegotiate their professional identities, and maintain their enthusiasm and commitment, and (ii) teacher education communities and organizations can create innovative and collaborative ways to implement teacher education in the future. In developing and updating teacher education, teacher educators themselves can be – and arguably should be – the prime actors in enhancing the quality of education. Thus, their own efforts to develop, research, and reform teacher education will be crucial. This highlights the need to apply the concept of professional agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013b) and to study teacher educators' agency. In line with this there is a need to promote teacher educators' professional agency if we are to realize new ways of implementing teacher education.

Overall, as part of a response to recent societal and educational challenges, there are good grounds for urging the sustainable development of teacher education organizations. In general, sustainable development refers to how an organization can achieve its goals and purposes successfully while using its ecological, economic, social, and human resources rationally (Docherty, Kira, & Shani, 2009; Wilenius & Kurki, 2012). We argue that in teacher education, sustainable development can be achieved through practical interventions at the individual, work-community, and organizational levels. This kind of development not only produces new knowledge but also supports individual, social, and organizational processes and transformations. For the sustainable development of teacher education to be successful, it

will be vital to support educators' individual and collective agency at work. At the individual level, agency is fundamental in the reshaping and renegotiating of teacher educators' professional identities. At the collective level, professional agency is needed for teacher educators to build a shared understanding of the creation of new work practices, the development of curricula, the transformation of educational organizations, and the introduction of educational innovations. Hence, in facing the future and in developing teacher education in a sustainable manner, the challenge lies in enhancing the processes of teacher educators' individual and collective professional agency. This will contribute to the renegotiation of the educators' professional identities, and to the necessary changes in their working practices, education, organizations, and learning.

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