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Teachers' Professional Learning within Learning Systems

More complex and diverse contexts for education mean that it is now necessary for teacher to communicate and collaborate with a wider range of stakeholders, within and across schools and communities. What is understood as opportunities for teachers' professional learning has expanded and increasingly there is recognition that teacher learning occurs in traditional and non-traditional contexts. For example, while there are still opportunities for teachers to take traditional CPD courses, there are numerous other opportunities including cross-sectoral learning (such as learning with health or social workers); community learning (such as learning with parents or employers); intergenerational learning; and online learning (such as teacher education MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) in different topics). This more expansive view of teacher professional learning contributes to increasing understanding of schools as learning organisations within learning systems. The recent publication by the European Commission (2018) *European ideas for better learning: governance of school education systems* emphasises the importance of strengthening and exploiting horizontal and vertical relationships within learning systems 'to organise collective intelligence in order to understand and act upon what is – and what needs to be - happening in different parts of the system.' (p5). However, to connect to and exploit the array of professional learning opportunities requires teachers to understand that there are many different learning possibilities, to take responsibility for their own professional learning and be willing to seek out and be open to new professional learning contexts. Much has already been published about teachers' professional learning in the European Journal of Teacher Education, but the purpose of, the motivations for, and the most effective approaches for teacher professional learning remain complex and dynamic. The articles in this issue explore different opportunities for teacher learning and different approaches to supporting their learning in Finland, Austria, Belgium, England, Malta, Turkey and Taiwan. The authors of the articles investigate different aspects of teacher learning and contribute to developing understanding of teachers' identity, their interest in professional issues, their recognition of the gaps in their knowledge or skills and their ability and willingness to work collaboratively with others.

Rautiainen, Mäensivu and Nikkola, authors of the first article in this issue, present the findings of their investigation of the possibilities first-year student teachers have to develop an interest in professional issues during their teacher education studies to become primary school teachers in Finland. The authors suggest that 'becoming interested' in professional issues should be the starting point for studies in higher education. However, their data collected from student teachers indicate that this is not necessarily the case. They emphasise that encouraging student teachers to become interested in professional issues is a complex matter and should not be taken for granted. Rautiainen et al.'s findings show that the student teachers found it difficult to find objects of interest in professional issues by themselves. The student teachers were focused on learning how to be a teacher, not on developing an interest in the phenomena they observed in school. These findings highlight the complexity of teacher education and the need for better understanding of teacher educators' role in framing and supporting the development of student teachers' interest in professional issues.

There has been a significant shift in the importance placed on the role of mentors who support newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in schools. In the second article, Betteney, in the second article, investigates the contribution that 8 mentors made to the development of NQTs' professional cultural capital in England. His analysis is framed by Bourdieu's interconnected notions of fields, habitus and capital, with particular regard to the motivations and challenges of the mentors' role. Betteney's findings indicate that the mentors in his study saw their role as empowering NQTs' professional agency rather than as a re-creator of the fields and habitus in which they operated. In the third article, Hong, Hwang and Hao, also focus on motivational issues in relation to professional development. However, in their article the analysis is of teachers' views rather than the perspectives of those supporting their development. Hong et al. collected data from 270 elementary school teachers in Taiwan regarding their motivation and intention to attend weekly professional development sessions. The authors' findings suggest that the participants valued the acquisition of pedagogical content knowledge, because of its expected usefulness to their teaching, more than they valued pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge. This view of 'usefulness to teaching' raises questions about how to encourage teachers to be more open to a broader range of opportunities to learn that do appear immediately to be of value to them.

Different approaches to teacher professional learning are being proposed and collaboration and cooperation between teachers are identified as contributing factors to schools as learning organisations (European Commission, 2018). The next 4 articles look at different approaches to professional development where learners are encouraged to work together. Krammer, Rossmann, Gastager and Gasteiger, examine the impact of the composition and characteristics of teacher teams necessary for effective cooperative teaching. The study of 321 language arts teachers in Austria focused on potential differences between self-selected teacher teams and teams composed by school leaders. The authors' findings showed significant differences in the factors of shared responsibility and enjoyment of the co-teaching processes. The teachers in the self-selected teaching teams showed significantly more positive ratings in these 2 factors, suggesting that self-selection of team members is helpful for establishing compatible teaching teams. However, Krammer et al. point out that self-selection does not necessarily lead to a higher quality of collaborative teaching. These findings indicate the complexity for those who have responsibility for facilitating the conditions in school for teacher professional learning. Geeraerts, Tynjälä and Heikkinen's article adds to a growing body of literature considering inter-generational learning by focusing on how and what teachers learn from their older and younger colleagues. Data gathered from 27 Belgian and Finnish teachers showed differences in what teachers learn from older and younger colleagues. The teachers reported learning innovative teaching methods and ICT skills from younger colleagues, whereas practical information, classroom management skills, self-regulation and community building were learned mainly from older colleagues. Different ways of being a teacher were learned from both younger and older colleagues. Informal activities and relationships, different forms of mentoring and working in subject teams or seminars were identified as important sources of learning. These articles demonstrate that schools and teachers are exploring new possibilities for professional learning. Attard Tonna and Bugeja explored the experience of educators who participated in a Train the Trainer programme in Malta. The aim of the programme was supporting teachers in the implementation of a new Learning Outcomes Framework in schools. Data were collected from 48 trainers to identify which factors helped render the training programme a rewarding and meaningful experience, how it equipped and empowered educators with the required skills to support their

peers, and how it contributed to the development of a professional learning community. The authors offer insights from their findings about how teacher learning environments can be transformed, particularly how more participation in professional learning approaches can be encouraged. Wang's article discusses the findings from a study of the experiences of an EFL expert teacher in Taiwan who formed a Reading Club. She took an interactive approach in the Club, which she found supported her professional learning and her students' learning. Wang explores the relationship between the teacher's identity and practice and discusses the pedagogical implications of the study findings for teacher education.

The final 2 articles in this issue consider the teaching of specific subjects (Science and English) with primary school pupils. Blackmore, Howard and Kington's article presents the findings of a study investigating how trainee teachers undertaking a one-year Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) prepare to teach science in primary schools. Similar to many other countries the study took place within an environment of educational change in teaching, assessment and curriculum. Science education changes specifically aimed to enable pupils to achieve a greater depth of understanding at the primary school stage. Experiences are provided for teacher learning through university-school partnerships involving combined placement and taught components of the course. Blackmore et al.'s findings showed that the majority of the trainees rated their training highly, but felt that the limited opportunities to observe and teach science in school during their training negatively influenced their overall development. The final article in this issue authored by Uztosun, considers the increasing tendency in many countries to include English classes in the early years of primary education. His research aimed to uncover the necessary teacher competences for English language teaching to younger students in Turkey. Using the Delphi technique, data were collected from a panel of experts consisting of 15 teachers and 16 teacher educators. This resulted in a list of 29 teacher competences which were categorised into five groups: 'theoretical and practical knowledge'; 'knowing the young learner; 'planning and organising teaching'; 'managing teaching'; and 'competence in English'. Uztosun's article concludes by discussing the implications of his findings for improving the effectiveness of English language teaching with young learners.

References

European Commission (2018) *European ideas for better learning: governance of school education systems,* Brussels: European Commission