



THE POTENTIALS OF A TRANSIENT TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR TEACHER EDUCATORS' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

Although there has been a rising interest in the profession of teacher educators, there is still a lack of research looking at the professional learning and development of teacher educators. Taking a European perspective, we intend to contribute to the field of teacher education. At the outset we outline current literature and research findings, indicating various challenges that teacher education professionals face in today's society, which are prominent in many contexts of language teacher education. Choosing to study a transient transnational community of 11 teacher educators as an autoethnographic case, we draw on qualitative data collected in the context of the ERASMUS+ project proPIC and use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to approach our data. In this article, we provide an overview of factors that teacher educators describe as beneficial and restraining when engaging in a transnational transient community. Based on our findings, we argue that through a systematically planned implementation and critical evaluation of transient transnational communities in language teacher education, professional learning can be fostered.

Keywords: transient transnational communities; teacher educators; professional learning; professional development; autoethnography; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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1. Introduction

The crucial role played by teacher educators within the formation of the next generation of teachers is indisputable (Murray, 2019). Still, trying to write about the professionals involved in teacher education is considered by many to be difficult (Davey, 2013; Guberman, 2018; Murray, 2019) and, in Czerniawski's (2018, p.1) words, a "daunting" task. Given the number of authors and studies that deal with the profession of teachers, it is striking that there has not been more attention paid to the professionals who are in charge of the education and training of future teachers in the first place. Looking at school teachers, a number of researchers have reported that "*teachers matter*" in regard to student learning (Elbaz, 1983, 1991; Shulman, 1987; Sachs, 2001; Alton-Lee, 2003; OECD, 2005; Hattie, 2009). Consequently, the issue of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) has received considerable attention in recent decades (Lortie, 1975; Bauer, 2000; Day, 1990; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2002; European Commission, 2011; OECD, 2009; Day, 2017). In the context of language teaching several authors have explored the profession of language teachers, as well as their development (Allwright, 1992, 2003; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Lee, 2011; Borg, 2013; Mann & Walsh, 2017). Yet, few authors have been able provide a systematic overview of existing theoretical models on this topic. Kennedy (2005, 2014) is one of the few authors who developed a literature-based theoretical model on CPD. In her paper she states:

"There still remains scant literature which seeks to build upon the range of models and perspectives [on CPD], providing theoretical tools for understanding them in context." (Kennedy, 2014, p. 691)

Looking at teacher educators, there has been even less discussion and research, as well as far less theory-driven analysis on professional learning and development. According to Davey (2013) it should be "*logical to assume*" that the fact that "*teachers matter*" also goes for teacher educators (ibid., p. 4). Yet there is, it seems, not so much interest in the occupational group that influences the initial phase of teachers, a fact that was previously criticised by Lanier and Little (1986):

"Teachers of teachers - what they are like, what they do, what they think - are typically overlooked in studies of teacher education" (ibid, p. 528).

During the past twenty years, there has been an increasing interest in the practices of teacher educators, mostly through their own engagement (Ducharme, 1993; Loughran, 2004; Lunenberg, Dengerink & Korthagen, 2014; Czerniawski, 2018; Murray, 2019). Moreover, some national and international reforms and policy documents (European Commission, 2013; Lunenberg, Murray, Smith & Vanderlinde, 2017) have taken up the topic with the goal of supporting professional teacher educators. Nonetheless, there is still a considerable silence about systematic research on teacher educators, their beliefs

and knowledge, as well as their preparation and professional learning (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; Cameron & Baker, 2004; Berry, 2007; Margolin, 2011). This is even more remarkable when considering the complex challenges that teacher educators face in their diverse professional environments. Due to internationalisation, the engagement in transnationalⁱⁱ networks and participation in third-party funded projects and initiatives is becoming steadily more important. Consequently, the involvement in transient and transnational communities is increasing in the context of teacher education (Hazel, 2017). In this article we take a European perspective, primarily intending to contribute to the field of teacher education. At the outset we outline current literature and research findings, indicating various challenges that professionals of teacher education face in today's society, which are prominent in many contexts of language teacher education. Choosing to study a transient transnational community of 11 teacher educators as an autoethnographic case, we draw on qualitative data collected in the context of an ERASMUS+ project, *proPIC* (Schwab & Oesterle, 2019) and use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to approach our data. In this article, we provide an overview of factors that teacher educators describe as beneficial and restraining when engaging in a transnational transient community. Relevant analyses of audio-recorded interviews are further presented to exemplify the perceived potentials of the participation in such a community. Based on our findings, we argue that through a systematically planned implementation and critical evaluation of transient transnational communities in language teacher education, professional learning can be fostered.

In the final section, we discuss to what extent the participation in transient transnational communities can support teacher educators in their own professional learning and help them cope better with the challenges and restraints they face in their daily work lives and their professional careers. We conclude by emphasizing the importance of integrating professional learning more thoroughly in the professional environment of teacher educators as we consider it as crucial in promoting long-term changes in teacher educators' professional identities to help them cope effectively with the challenges they face in a complex and constantly changing workplace.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Mapping the Challenges

As mentioned above, research in the field of teacher education is a rather recent area which has not received a lot of attention in the past (Vanderlinde, Tuytens, De Wever & Aelterman, 2016). Consequently, there is little systematic or coherent research to inform and guide the teacher education community, which is a conspicuous insufficiency given

ⁱⁱ The term *transnational* is generally understood to mean 'extending or operating across national boundaries' (Oxford University Press, 2017). Throughout this paper we will use the term to refer to something taking place 'across borders' with the active involvement of the professionals travelling to and interacting with other professionals from outside their own nation.

the complex challenges that teacher educators face in their diverse professional environments.

This complexity begins with the term *teacher educator* which is predominantly used in anglophone countries to refer to *teachers of teachers*. The European Commission (2013) points out that these professionals have only recently become the focus of policymakers. They further observe that the increased use of the term *teacher educator* is a trend across the EU, with the teacher educator profession being in its early stages of development (ibid., p. 7). Studies from non-anglophone contexts, for example one conducted in the Netherlands, show that the term *teacher educator* is recently being adopted by some non-anglophone countries (Koster & Dengerink, 2001; Swennen & van der Klink, 2009). In 2014, Lunenberg ascribed four challenging characteristics to the teacher educator's profession:

- a) They come from different backgrounds.
- b) They work in different contexts.
- c) They educate different types of students.
- d) They teach different subjects.

Based on these characteristics, Lunenberg et al. (2014) define the term teacher educators as “*all those who teach or coach (student) teachers with the aim of supporting their professional development*” (ibid., p. 5). With the objective of creating a basis for transnational discussion, the European Commission (2013) has introduced the term in its reform papers. Inspired by Murray and Male (2005), who described teacher educators as professionals who are responsible for the preparation and professional learning for pre- and in-service teachers (ibid., p. 29), the European Commission (2013) describes teacher educators as follows:

“Teacher educators guide teaching staff at all stages in their careers, model good practice, and undertake the key research that develops our understanding of teaching and learning” (ibid., p. 6)

In line with these authors, we operationalize the term teacher educators to include educational professionals who are responsible for the education, training and professional development of pre- as well as in-service teachers ranking from temporarily hired adjuncts to former teachers and professors from various disciplines often without a pedagogical background. Teacher educators base their professional practices on previous experiences in school, but also higher education (HE) settings as well as on key research in which they engage personally, and thus support processes of lifelong learning and help to improve and innovate teacher education.

With the term thus defined, we will map five major challenges described in the current literature on the profession of teacher educators. In doing so, we have been guided by two reviews. The first was conducted by Lunenberg et al. (2014). The first, Lunenberg et al. (2014), includes 137 summarized studies on the professional roles, behavior and development of teacher educators in North America as well as the UK, the

Netherlands, Israel, and Australia. The second review is by Beck and Kosnik (2019) wherein the authors' international literature review identifies the twenty 'most accomplished' teacher educators in Europe and beyond, based on their research and teaching practices.

From these two reviews we have highlighted the following. First is the "*lightning speed*" (Williamson, 2013; Simões, Lourenço & Costa, 2018) at which change takes place in all areas of our society. In this context, Williamson (2013) refers to Darling-Hammond (2006) who pointed out that "*the new mission of schools is to prepare students for products and problems that have not yet been identified, using technologies that have not yet been invented*" (ibid., cited Williamson, 2013, p. 2). Teacher educators are faced with an unknown future of learning and teaching, in which they need to teach teachers how to teach students. At the same time, "*teacher educators must worry about not only what to teach but also how, so that knowledge for teaching actually shapes teachers' practice and enables them to become adaptive experts who can continue to learn*" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 307). Williamson concludes with calling it a paradox that teacher educators "*must prepare teachers for the schools we have while at the same time we must prepare them for the schools we want*" (Williamson, 2013, p. 2). In this changing context of teacher education, Czerniawski (2018) notes that many teacher educators are governed by reforms that are driven by a) too much choice, which refers to a "*baffling array*" of concepts and studies on effective learning and teaching, and b) the political impact of international comparison, leading to an overall competition expressed through "*a desire to climb world rankings in educational league tables*" (ibid., p. 1). In addition, Menter (Bath Spa Institute for Education, 2016) observes an overall politicisation of teaching and teacher education. This can be observed in national elections, the influence of transnational reports on policy reforms, and in international comparisons such as those provided by the OECD (ibid.) and also referred to by Czerniawski (2018). The influence of so-called "*travelling policies*" (Ozga & Jones, 2006) can be regarded as decisive on these developments, as they are shaped by global trends and then serve as a frame for local "*embedded policie*" (Conroy et al., 2019). These factors lead to a noticeable uncertainty in and obscurity of the job, as well as an obvious pressure to compete.

Studies looking at HE staff show a second issue: many people, primarily women, suffer from ill-health and stress which are to a certain extent due to some of the above-mentioned factors (Van den Besselaar & Sandström, 2017; Van Lankveld, Schoonenboom, Volman, Croiset & Beishuizen, 2016). Consequently, one could argue, this can have an effect on the teaching quality of these professionals and on the whole educational system as such. Furthermore, the international competition based on accountability policies has led to increased top-down pressure to engage in research, or in fact to publish and to become involved in third-party funding (Bath Spa Institute for Education, 2016; Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 2018; Wals, 2019).

Third, the pressure in teacher education to engage in research can be seen as a dilemma in some contexts, because teacher educators do not view their primary role as researchers and often do not feel prepared to engage in research activities (Willemse &

Boei, 2017). Indeed, a study by Swennen, Geerink and Volman (2017) investigating fifteen Dutch teacher educators reveals a lack of connection between research and teaching practices, showing that many teacher education institutes do not recognise acquired or existing abilities or ambitions of their staff as researchers. Calling teacher education, a *“semi-academic world”* implies that it is a transitional field between the practical and the academic world (ibid., p. 146). Investigating 28 teacher educators from England in their first 3 years of working on Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Murray and Male (2005) found that becoming active in research was perceived to be a challenging task for newly hired teacher educators. Using a qualitative approach, Chetty and Lubben (2010) interviewed 20 teacher educators from South Africa, confirming the findings of Swennen et al. (2017). Based on their data, they argue that by many teacher educators *“the research role is seen as unfamiliar, and sometimes unnecessary or even threatening”* (ibid., p. 819). Like Swennen et al. (2017), the authors refer to an overall gap between research and practice, further stating that *“a research strategy will be appreciated that integrates (and thus recognises) the expertise of the school teacher with the new role of the researcher”* (Chetty & Lubben, 2010, p. 819).

Including this researcher role, Czerniawski (2018) reflects on teacher educators in the twenty-first century and stresses the multifaceted role they have:

“Depending on where we work, we are often involved in coaching, mentoring, researching, assessing, marketing, bid writing and designing curricula. We are the gatekeepers, hand-holders and emotional carers for a future generation of classroom practitioners” (ibid., p. 55).

As a fourth major challenge, it becomes clear in this description that the traditional image of professionals who teach teachers has shifted towards a more diverse and dynamic identity. Being a teacher educator does not merely mean teaching teachers. Universities are no longer held together by various epistemological positions from different fields, but instead are required to take a more practical and innovative approach to teacher education (Peiser, 2016 cited Czerniawski, 2018, p. 70) in which teacher educators are asked to constantly redefine their identity *“as they navigate the tensions between self, practice and context”* (Kitchen & Russell, 2012, p. 6). Teacher education must constantly re-position itself (Conroy, Hulme & Menter, 2019). In their study, Lunenberg et al. (2017) identify five professional roles of teacher educators: a) teachers of teachers, b) researchers, c) coaches, d) curriculum developers, and e) gatekeepers. Looking at these diverse roles, Davey's (2013) point that the great need of teacher educators to actively develop and assert their own identity as a professional field (ibid., p. 176) is well received. Fifth, the overarching scarcity of programmes or courses that prepare new teacher educators and support experiences professionals in their own learning and teaching hinders them from engaging in and developing this multifaceted identity (see Kitchen & Russell 2012 for data from a Canadian setting and Murray & Male 2005 for the European perspective). The latter support this with the second finding of their study which shows

that establishing a new professional identity is often perceived as difficult, especially in terms of developing a new pedagogy for HE teaching (ibid., p. 139). Based on this, the authors argue that the preparation and learning of teacher educators needs “*to be tailored to the specific needs of the individual, as well as to the contexts of each education department and its mission statements*” (ibid., p. 139). Given the variety and number of contexts, Ritter (2007) raises the importance of becoming aware of the specific needs in the first place. Choosing a self-study approach, Ritter (2007) analyses some challenges of establishing a professional identity as a teacher educator in the USA, focusing on teacher educators who had previously been classroom teachers. He concludes that “*the process of becoming a teacher educator is far more complex than is typically acknowledged, as it involves modifications to professional identity as well as to pedagogy*” (ibid., p. 20).

The general need for supporting teacher educators in their own learning is supported by several studies analysing the professional identity of teacher educators (Zeichner, 2005; Bullock & Ritter, 2011; Davey, 2013; Lunenberg et al., 2017). This is in line with the results of the European InFo-TED project (International Forum for Teacher Educator Development [InFo-TED], 2019). In the course of the project, the international forum of teacher educators worked on gathering information on the professional learning and development of teacher educators in Europe and beyond. Above all, their aim was to raise more awareness in this field, as well as to promote professional development among teacher educators. Using questionnaires and interviews to collect data from 1,158 teacher educators, the researchers noted that the professionals are “*only moderately satisfied*” with their own professional learning. Further, teacher educators reported having a great desire to engage in more learning (ibid., p. 4).

However, in the context of language teacher education, many authors disregard this general lack of systematic and situated learning opportunities (Byrd, Hlas, Watzke & Valencia, 2011; Mann & Walsh, 2017). This is the case for various national contexts. As early as the 1980s, the American authors Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987) expressed the need to conduct more research in the field of foreign language education and referred to a general lack of “*directions and recommendations offered*” to training university professors of foreign language teacher education (ibid., p. 292). Likewise, Bailey et al. (1998) criticise the lack of reflective practices among teacher educators. Already in the early 1990s they commenced a project that dealt with Language Teacher Educators Collaborative Conversations. In line with others, the authors stress that teacher educators, although voicing and demanding reflection from their trainee teachers, seldomly engage in processes of reflection themselves (Bailey et al., 1998; Feinman-Nemser, 2001). Although primarily addressing teachers in their book *Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching*, Mann and Walsh (2017) provide a number of ideas and strategies that can also be used by teacher educators themselves. Focusing on reflective practices the authors identify some major challenges in regard to language teacher education: a) a dominance of certain models, thus providing a less dynamic approach to reflection, b) a lack of research as a basis for reflection, c) a focus on the individual rather than on the community, d) a dominance of written forms of reflection, thus a lack of oral or more alternative forms of

reflection, e) a general difficulty when it comes to assessment of reflection, f) a lack of reflective tools, and g) that teacher educators hardly practice what they preach when it comes to reflective practices and professional learning on the whole (ibid., p. 15-22). Farrell (2018), in referring to American second language teacher educators, argues that it is crucial for these professionals to “*reflect and reconsider their roles*” (ibid., p. 5). Summing up, the importance of conducting more research and supporting reflection and collaboration is relevant for most national contexts in Europe and beyond.

Although the above-mentioned authors have been influenced by different national contexts, experiencing quite distinctive approaches in their own country if not institution, there are some common challenges that can be identified from a European stance:

- A constantly and vastly changing society, involving an increasing internationalisation and a rapid digitalisation, as well as an overall politicisation (Ozga & Jones, 2006; Czerniawski, 2018);
- Critical working conditions – especially for women – increasingly leading to stress and ill-health (Van den Besselaar & Sandström, 2017);
- Several areas of responsibility in a highly diverse environment (Czerniawski, 2018), including the pressure to combine research and practice (Willemse & Boei, 2017);
- Multifaceted teacher trainer identity;
- A comprehensive lack of systematic, scaffolded and situated learning opportunities (InFo-TED, 2019).

These challenges are primarily due to an overall and intense social, technological and cultural change. Aiming at developing the field of teacher education further, we consider it to be crucial to look at these global challenges in order to engage in a dialogue between individuals from different countries and even different institutions and ranks to define a range of possible strategies for how to approach teacher education and prepare “*teachers for the remainder of the twenty-first century*” (Czerniawski, 2018, p. 62).

2.2 Focusing a Transient and Transnational Workplace

In the professional landscape of today’s teacher education, the on-going expansion of activities into a global context has provoked interwoven processes that significantly change the traditionally stable and well-established communities within a Higher Education Institution (HEI) (Sachs, 2001; Czerniawski, 2018). Thus, professionals working in the field of teacher education are increasingly asked to adapt to this change. Due to internationalisation, the engagement in transnational networks and the participation in third-party funded projects and initiatives is becoming steadily more important (European Commission, 2018). The German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst [DAAD], 2019) points out that education and research are increasingly practised through the commitment to international networks. Teacher educators rely more and more on international partnerships and the competence of the professionals to interact in transnational workplaces.

Teacher education is undergoing a process of becoming globalised in which mobility, multilingual workplaces, as well as digital and global communication have become core elements of everyday work life. This leads to the professional environment of language teacher education being comprised more and more of transient and transnational communities, which are often oscillating and overlapping on various levels (Hazel, 2017). As Mortensen (2017) notes: *"In all these contexts, people from diverse backgrounds regularly find themselves in situations where they have to negotiate solutions to shared problems without being able to rely on extensive shared linguistic experience or sociocultural habit"* (ibid., p. 272).

The above implied social configurations in which people from diverse backgrounds find themselves working together around a shared activity and for a certain period of time are called *"transient multilingual communities"* by Mortensen and Hazel (2017, p. 256). In his work, which he adopts from the concept of the 'speech community' coined by Gumperz (1968), Hymes (1972), and Labov (1972), as well as on the more recent concept of *"community of practice"* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Mortensen (2017) primarily focuses transient multilingual communities among individuals interacting in HE contexts in Denmark. In contrast to the two preceding concepts, Mortensen stresses that the assumed consensus in *"speech communities"* or sharedness in *"communities of practice"* cannot be fully applied to the concept of *"transient multilingual communities"* (Mortensen, 2017, p. 273). In reference to Goebel (2010) and Wortham (2005), Mortensen points out that the members of these communities do not share the same trajectories of socialisation, thus they do not share linguistic norms or sociocultural habits a priori, and therefore have the need to develop these as they go along together in a process of shared socialisation (Mortensen, 2017, p. 272). The author states:

"Communities of practice may be transient communities and vice versa, but the two types of community are not mutually constitutive" (ibid., p. 274).

On the basis of this assumption, Mortensen (2017) develops the concept of transient multilingual communities, characterising them as a) emergent, b) heterogeneous, and c) activity-based (ibid., p. 274). In addition, he introduces a scale of transience and semiotic sedimentation, giving others a frame to evaluate different types of communities in regard to the degree of their transience and shared semiotic resources, including their sociocultural experiences. Hazel (2017) further introduces the notion of *"transient project communities"*, which he describes as *"cohorts of people who are brought together to be engaged in some temporary bounded joint endeavor which results in a prior agreed-upon outcome"* (ibid., p. 309).

In the present article, we shift the focus from the aspect of multilingualism, as was the case in Mortensen's (2017) and Hazel's (2017) studies, to transient transnational communities that are in this case formed around a shared project for a limited amount of time. Based on the work of Mortensen (2017) and Hazel (2017), we propose the following definition when speaking about such communities: social configurations where

professionals from diverse sociocultural backgrounds come together (physically or online) to engage across borders in a temporary bounded activity which results in agreed-upon outcomes. Rather than looking at linguistic practices as is the case when studying transient multilingual communities, we will investigate the potentials of transient transnational communities in the context of language teacher education to foster professional learning. Using the concept of transience (Mortensen, 2017) as a theoretical perspective, but also as an object of educational research, we explore how professionals being part of such a community perceive its benefits and limitations as they undergo processes of mutual socialisation, developing a shared understanding when there were no or few pre-established shared sociocultural norms and assumptions a priori.

This study was conducted in the context of an ERASMUS+ project called *proPIC*ⁱⁱⁱ. The project partners aim at empowering both prospective teachers and teacher educators to actively engage in lifelong learning processes and to cooperatively establish a culture of self-reflection, innovation and interculturality in foreign and second language learning and teaching. Being determined by the interplay between research-orientation, transnational collaboration and the creative use of mobile-technologies, it intends to a) define a theoretical framework for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in Language Teacher Education, b) further develop and trial an adaptable study programme creatively using mobile technologies and c) bridge the gap between researchers and practitioners. English was chosen as the project's main language, although only one partner comes from an English-speaking country (the UK). The English language is used by all partners, as well as by all participating students, as a means of communication. The decision to use English was based on the language's status which Kankaanranta, Karhunen and Louhiala-Salminen (2018) describe as "*the most widely spoken foreign language globally*" (ibid., p. 335).

3. Method

Because we approached this investigation through a project-embedded, autoethnographic case study design, we chose to analyse our data using a still relatively new methodology, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In this paper, we seek to gain insights into the perceived benefits and challenges of 11 teacher educators that have been involved in a transient and transnational project setting, namely the *proPIC* project. Observing and analyzing the researchers' own group as an established participant, this paper is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of becoming a member of a transient transnational community?
- 2) What are potential benefits and challenges for teacher educators when they engage in a transient transnational community?

ⁱⁱⁱ *proPIC* stands for Promoting professionalism, innovation and transnational collaboration in foreign and second language learning and teaching – integrating research-orientation and mobile technologies in teacher education (Schwab & Oesterle 2019).

3.1. Autoethnography

We use autoethnography in an effort to conduct a study among our 'own people' (Hayano, 1979, p. 99), namely our fellow project partners. As three of us are still a member of the project consortium that under investigation, we were able to approach our data in an inductive way and to understand a transient transnational community from "*within*" (Eriksson, 2010, p. 10). Further, we intend to capture moments of transnational experience and present insider knowledge of this transnational experience (Adams et al., 2017, 4).

We are aware of our own role in the process of data collection and analysis, as well as of the importance of our positionality and constant re-evaluation throughout the whole research process. Thinking *dialogically* as Baldwin (2013) describes it - being involved in the project itself, gaining a practical perspective, but also looking at the theory behind it and conducting research - provided us with a wider and more holistic picture.

3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA was initially conceptualised as a psychological-oriented approach, which emerged from Phenomenology in 1996. Jonathan Smith was first to theorise IPA in the field of health psychology. Since then, the approach has been used by a number of qualitative researchers from various disciplines, predominantly in health, social and human sciences. In his paper, Noon (2018) describes three fundamental orientations guiding IPA: Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Idiography. Combining these three, IPA seeks to uncover "*the participants*" view of the topic "*under investigation*" (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999, p. 218). Although IPA has received only "*limited attention*" (Noon, 2018) in educational research so far, there are some researchers who have been using it to understand the lived experiences of those involved in various educational systems (e.g. Bailey, 2011; Noon, 2017; Whelan, 2017; and Crawford, 2019).

We use IPA to approach these questions with the goal of identifying common themes, namely common potentials and challenges. We seek to explore "*the way things are perceived*" (Tuffour, 2017, p. 2) by our participants and intend to understand the universal nature of the phenomenon we observe. The phenomenon in our case is the participants' participation in the proPIC project, their "*lived experiences*" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Thus, our study is grounded in the individual's perception of being a part of this project consortium. We would like to reiterate that IPA is by no means a mere description of the phenomenon under study but rather an interpretative analysis which is in this respect strongly connected to Hermeneutics. Thus, we aim at creating an interpretative description of the teacher educators' perceptions that gets as close to their own views as possible.

3.3 Participants

The study involved 11 teacher educators, 7 male and 4 female professionals (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participants

	Local transient team	Gender	Years involved in teacher education	Professional Background
1	Germany	male	15-30 years	Professor
2		female	5-15 years	PhD student, research assistant and local project manager
3	Germany	male	15-30 years	Professor
4		female	5-15 years	PhD student, research assistant and local project manager
5	Sweden	male	10-25 years	PhD, lecturer, local project manager
6		male	10-25 years	MA, lecturer, local project manager
7	Spain	male	10-25 years	PhD, lecturer
8		female	5-15 years	PhD student, research assistant and local project manager
9		male	15-30 years	Professor
10	UK	male	15-30 years	Professor
11		female	5-15 years	PhD, research assistant and local project manager

We chose our sample on the basis of their participation in the proPIC project consortium, meaning that all of the participants were to some extent working in the field of language teacher education. Thus, the group was a rather homogenous sample. However, one major characteristic of the sample group was a certain diversity in regard to their occupational status and professional career. There were four professionals involved from two German universities, two from Sweden, three from Spain, and two from the UK. It is important to note that this transient group consisted of five transient national teams, which naturally had an impact on the dynamics of the whole group. Depending on the term used in the individual national contexts, the group included four senior lecturers or professors who have had a lot of experience (15 to 30 years) in teaching and researching and acquired the title *senior lecturer* or *professor* at their institutions. The consortium further included three *junior researchers* or *academic and teaching staff* who have been working in this area for ten to twenty-five years with different experiences in giving lectures and/or in engaging in research activities. All except one had completed their doctoral studies. Finally, there were four *research assistants* or *teaching staff* involved who have been working in the field for five to fifteen years but were at the beginning of their research careers, only one of them having finished her PhD thesis. In regard to the different work conditions, most of them had permanent contracts, but three of them had non-permanent agreements with a duration of the given project period. Three of them had two to three different contracts as they were involved in several projects or other jobs. Professional backgrounds included four participants who had worked as school

teachers and seven who had been drawn into research after their own studies in different areas or through working in various jobs in teacher education or elsewhere.

3.4 Data Collection

We collected a variety of data in the context of the project. As this paper focuses on the teacher educators' perceptions of being part of such a transient transnational community, we decided to focus primarily on the interview materials, whereas the field notes serve as additional background data to answer the research questions.

Table 2: Data Collection

Data sources used for the study	Data analysis used for the study
10 semi-structured interviews which were audio-recorded using ZOOM and transcribed using the TRANSANA software	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
personal field notes of one author attending the project meetings and job-shadowing some of the participants in their working context	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

3.5 Data Analysis

We were driven by the phenomenological endeavor to 'glean' the individuals' direct experiences. Therefore, we conducted 11 semi-structured interviews in which we encouraged the teacher educators to tell us 'their own story in their own words' (Noon, 2018, p. 75). All interviews were then transcribed by one researcher, as were all of the other collected audio data, using the TRANSANA software. This researcher read through the data and identified a first set of common themes using only pen and paper. In a next step, we used the MAXQDA software to re-read our data. The software helped us to (re-)structure our themes, to categorise the various patterns more easily and to make the amount of data we had more manageable. After this, we created an overview using a regular Word table to visualise all themes that had emerged. Further, we added a detailed description to each theme. Based on this table, we conducted another extensive literature review and added supporting as well as contradicting information to it. In a final step, we returned to our data and discussed our final themes to then identify the "core essence" (Alase, 2017, p. 16) of themes, showing what our participants had perceived and the interpretations we made.

In order to conduct a deep idiographic analysis, we also used other data sources (see Table 2). We embraced the process of our own 'sense-making' of the phenomenon by incorporating into our data a digital researcher's diary, recordings of our personal reflections, and written notes that were created while observing the participants during project meetings. This led to what Smith (2004) calls a double hermeneutic: We observed the teacher educators trying to make sense of their personal and social world, but we also included our own conceptions of making sense of the teacher educators' sense-making

(ibid., p. 40). By visiting the working contexts of most of the participants, it was possible to examine them in their particular environment, which is an essential tenet of IPA (Quest, 2014). During these visits, one researcher was able to gather background information on the participants, but also observe the local transient team working together in various project activities. Thus, the data included notes that were taken when job-shadowing some of the participants in their daily routines for a couple of weeks.

4. Findings

4.1 What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of becoming a member of a transient transnational community?

Our joint analysis shows that the advantages and disadvantages described by our participants generally refer to factors that were more constitutive than the benefits and challenges they perceived, which emerged in the process of the project.

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p><u>The project setting</u></p> <p>Scaffolded and mediated actions</p> <p>A common language</p> <p>A transient setting</p> <p>Less hierarchical structures</p> <p>Innovative content</p>	<p><u>Contextual factors</u></p> <p>Financial issues</p> <p>General workload</p> <p>No recognition</p>
<p><u>Diverse symmetry and personal sympathy</u></p> <p>Same, same, but different</p> <p>The personal in the professional</p>	

Through our analysis it became apparent that the budget but also the organisational frame that constitutes the overall *setting* of an ERASMUS+ project plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of the partner collaboration. We noticed that in order to create a space for partners to collaborate and develop, there must be transparency and the power of co-decision. Staying flexible and viewing the whole project as a dynamic work space in which all individuals manipulate and co-shape the processes is indispensable. Thus, clear but open management of the project was reported to be a facilitator for intentional and productive collaboration. Many teacher educators described that they felt more supported in case of any conflicts or misunderstandings, as the project had a clear mediator: the project leader. This was also the case for all meetings and activities, which were *scaffolded and mediated* by the project coordinator. In contrast to the daily work lives of many teacher educators, which is mostly reliant on the professionals' self-organisation

and management, this collectively planned setting was perceived as highly beneficial for a joint project, but also for individual learning, as well as participant satisfaction in the project. None of the participants noted that they saw any problem in using English as a *lingua franca*. On the contrary, many perceived it as advantageous. Two reported having improved their language skills.

Our analysis further shows that the *transient* character of the community was another factor that most partners perceived as helpful or would otherwise expect to become problematic:

"I think if we were a permanent group for longer than three years maybe those things [referring to conflicts] would start, to develop." (participant 5)

One major factor was that compared to the regular professional environment of language teacher education, this project setting was perceived to hold *fewer hierarchical structures*. This was based on the fact that in this transient community all participants were, to a certain extent, 'novices' when they entered, but also 'experts' in their own fields which they brought with them into the community. Furthermore, they were explicitly 'chosen' based on their expertise, which automatically implied some kind of respect towards their professional selves. This was reported to facilitate a more open exchange and constructive discussions among partners from different occupational groups where ideas could be communicated freely. Nevertheless, in the ERASMUS+ setting, there is a certain hierarchy integrated right from the start. One project partner is the coordinator, the others are the project partners. However, this aspect was perceived to be more supportive than limiting as it led to clear responsibilities inside the community.

With regard to project management, the content of the project was perceived to be very interesting and motivating as it involved many '*innovative*' elements that partners reported they had little time and space to work on in their daily routines:

"I think the basic conditions given by this project are very helpful for having good experiences and of course these conditions are based on funding, we have to repeat this, you can't get the same conditions at your institute, if you ... bring up an innovative idea at your own institute or department, and you don't have the money to put it into practice, and everything is based on good will or additional hours of work and so on ... this won't work in the same sense." (participant 6)

For all partners, diversity and transnationalism was perceived as something interesting and inspiring *a priori*. Our analysis shows that all participants share more positive experiences in regard to working in transnational settings. It was revealed that all project partners seem to have a common positive attitude, as well as a shared aim to build sustainable partnerships which last longer than the duration of the project. Although all partners emphasised the advantage of working in a diverse and transnational group, they also mentioned a kind of 'sameness' and 'sharedness' which

they perceived among all partners. Often the words 'different' and 'same' were used in one sentence:

"...we have so many things in common ... working in teacher education all of us in different disciplines, with different point of views of course ... still we are ... having a lot of similarities that we can discuss and so on and it gives us also an inspiration to meet them I guess." (participant 6)

Even at the stage of choosing the project partners and conducting several preparatory activities, these decisions were based not only on *professional symmetry*, but also on *personal sympathy*. This was explicitly perceived by most of the project partners and observed to be an important basis for productive and positive project collaborations:

"...okay, the relations as far as I understand are quite good which has to do with the fact that they in a way knew each other beforehand, to some extent and that they try to work together, I mean this is the main intention, all of the partners try to work with each other." (participant 1)

This was also perceived to be the basis for the negotiation and socialisation of the project consortium as a strong transient transnational community, in which the personal and professional levels were well balanced.

Data analysis showed there were not many factors identified that were described as *limiting*. Three aspects that were mentioned can be seen in relation to the different national and institutional contexts of the project partners: *financial issues*, the *general workload* and little or *no recognition* by colleagues and the university management. Particularly in one national context, the university made great financial cuts, taking 70% of the partner budget for administrative reasons. This was perceived to be highly limiting for our colleagues, as they had to do most of the work in their free time:

"...it partly depends on how the institution provides resources, so I know our colleagues in [...] they're not getting any of the money, the institution is eating it up, that's a big problem, isn't it?" (participant 10)

4.2 What are potential benefits and challenges for teacher educators when they engage in a transient transnational community?

Having exemplified some of the underlying advantages and disadvantages constituting the community under investigation, this section comprises potential benefits and challenges that emerged from our data analysis. The table below summarises the multiple factors that the participants of this study described as beneficial and challenging, especially in contrast to their daily work lives:

Table 4: Potential benefits and challenges

Potential benefits	Potential challenges
A Transnational Experience	Appearing differences
Experiencing the Self	Communication issues
Building partnerships and strengthening Europe	Management issues
More learning opportunities	
Balance the personal and the professional	
Low hierarchies	
Individual and collective success	

Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of this study was the potential of engaging in and learning from a transnational experience:

"...the value of the experience itself, as a teacher educator, the experience is really good, because not only the students, but also we with another teacher educator that has a specific background, or teaches in a different context than you, which makes you understand your own context better, and helps you to think about things that you have not thought about before ... so this is very good also, in the life of the teacher education itself." (participant 8)

In this statement, the participant describes explicitly the value of experiencing otherness as an essential step to understand one's own context better and thus to develop and learn. In line with this, participants reported that it was immensely effective to take a step back and discuss matters in a broader sense with other professionals from across borders:

"...it's quite interesting how we've all started from the same point, but half a project later we are all doing it your own way, in the meeting it showed that we were trying to then get back on to an even peel, trying to get back, to bring it all together, so that we can then proceed, all singing from the same song sheet, that has been interesting." (participant 11)

This was due to the fact that each partner engaged in various activities which they then had to integrate in their own context (e.g. giving certain workshops or delivering similar training modules). Afterwards, the partners got together again to develop a common structure or frame. Moreover, many participants talked about the positive 'outcome' of *international partnerships and networks* are being built and strengthened. We found that the participants put a great emphasis on the potential to *strengthen Europe* with these transnational projects:

"I believe in Europe, yes, I think Europe is the future and I think the development of programmes like proPIC have to be the future and we have to convince the students that we don't have to be scared about travelling to another place. To work in the way, we're working here ... commits." (participant 7)

Analysing our data, we found that many participants reported that this transient and transnational project setting can provide various *learning opportunities*. In contrast to the reality of their regular professional work life, participants valued the time, space and interactions that were provided in the context of this transnational community. Mostly, we found that our participants referred to dialogic learning opportunities, which they found highly beneficial for their own learning and development:

"I think we as the lecturers, we and the partners involved, we learn most I would say because we actually do communicate, we interact in these intercultural spheres all the time." (participant 1)

Although the project's intention was to foster professional development among student teachers, it turned out to have an even greater impact on the professional learning of the teacher educators themselves:

"... you have the capacity to learn from others [...], this is the most positive part [...] going to a different country, seeing the Universities, the different contexts, it's a good experience for all of us to have the opportunity to see different educational contexts, different ways of learning at the university and different ways of teaching as well." (participant 9)

Described as essential in regard to learning and development was the balance between the personal and the professional, and in line with this, the low hierarchies.

"...nothing compares to this really personal experience you make within a project, you can't read this in a book and this helps to make the other countries get to know their situation better" (participant 3)

"...it's to do with friendship as well, it's this affective feature of the relationship, you see it's kind of, you are giving me some sort of you know bond, affective bond." (participant 9)

"I also like that normally you see the professors as experts, as people who are like sure about what they do, but then during the meeting you realise that they also have their doubts, that they also have questions and challenges, and that they share that and I feel that they also acknowledge that they have to learn and that's also something positive where I think okay that's good, it's not that I am here down and they are on the top, no, we are new, we are all together in this project and in that sense we are equals." (participant 4)

The teacher educators noted the great authenticity of the project activities, noting that they learned a lot from using digital communication tools in particular. *Individual and collective success* was another aspect that was regarded as beneficial to promote learning and development.

What the participants mainly described as challenging were *appearing differences* between the partners in the course of the project. They were partly epistemological, motivational, personal, but also institutional. Some participants mentioned, for example, that they struggled with different concepts that appeared in course of the project. One of these was the 'e-portfolio':

"I still have the feeling that everybody has a different understanding of what a portfolio is, even though we did the last meeting, we talked about it a little bit ... but conceptually I think they understand something completely different [...], I'm still surprised [...] so I think at this point we haven't succeeded in terms of our part [the e-portfolio] conceptually, even though and I said to XXX the other day, maybe at the end of the third cohort, or at the end of the project they will understand what the portfolio is, or they understand our understanding of what an e-portfolio is, because [now] they use it completely different." (participant 9)

Though few *communication issues* were encountered, there were some based on technological problems, but also social tensions such as conflicts of interest:

"...and he was really quite cross about the whole thing, was quite annoyed, because he said, if he'd just asked me, or another partner, we would've both told him that it wasn't a problem, we could've stuck with this date, it would've been fine, but that's communication issues, isn't it?" (participant 11)

In regard to the *management*, there were some issues that were focused on finances or organisational matters:

"...even though there have been some difficulties with the agenda and how we should have proceeded with different things that maybe could have already been decided by the leaders [...] sometimes this made me a little bit frustrated that it takes a lot of time to discuss things that should already have been decided" (participant 6)

5. Discussion

In this article, we presented an overview of the factors that teacher educators perceived when engaging in a transient transnational community. By conducting semi-structured interviews and using IPA to approach our data, we were able to explore which factors were perceived to be more advantageous and more disadvantageous, more beneficial and more challenging. Drawing on the challenges described at the beginning of this

paper, we would like to make some suggestions regarding how transient transnational communities can be used to support teacher educators in their own professional practices. Hence, we would like to take up two aspects in this final section that we think are crucial in promoting long-term changes in teacher educators' professional identities to help them cope effectively with the challenges they face in a complex and constantly changing workplace.

5.1. Raising awareness through transnational collaboration

First, our data show that it is essential to become aware of the existing challenges teacher educators face in their work life. We argue that only through this *professional awareness* can teacher educators start orienting and developing systematically. We think this awareness can be promoted through integrating transient transnational communities in teacher education. Based on our data, we found that our participants started reflecting on their own situations and practices by getting to know others:

"...we have so many things in common ... working in teacher education all of us in different disciplines, with different point of views of course ... still we are ... having a lot of similarities that we can discuss and so on and it gives us also an inspiration to meet them I guess." (participant 6)

Sequences like this reminded us of the phrase *same, same, but different*, which is also used by Boye (2016) in reference to a cognitive process of 'making distinctions between what is the same as something else and what is dissimilar enough to be considered different' (Ibid., p. 15). Transnational collaboration can aid in raising the awareness of global issues (Jaritz 2011) which teachers and educators need to understand in today's diverse and interconnected society of teaching in multicultural and multilingual classroom settings that they will be working in (Stewart 2008). Furthermore, fostering and integrating international mobility in teacher education corresponds with the Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications of the European Commission (2005) of making teaching a mobile profession that participates in European projects and connects with other European countries (Ibid., p. 3). Above all, cross-border mobility through education and culture can help strengthen a European Identity (European Commission 2018), which is in line with the findings of this study. From our data we can see that *professional awareness* is essential for teacher educators in order to be able to orientate themselves in their professional environment. In the case of teacher education, this awareness needs more research, more evidence from which it can grow. Many authors have stressed the importance of conducting more research in this field (Murray & Male, 2005, Mann & Walsh, 2017).

In planning and managing a transient transnational community, it seems to be relevant that not only the coordinating member, but all partners are motivated to find out about the other partners' preconceptions and opinions on these factors in order *to develop a group mindset*, meaning a shared approach to understanding and attitudes. This

includes the personal, as well as the professional level. In this project it was noticeable that although there were conflicts between some partners or colleagues from one institution, all partners spoke very positively of the project consortium and the project itself. Despite the fact that Hofmann (2020) found hierarchy to be a major issue in transnational settings rather than in national ones, we found the opposite. It could be argued that Hofmann (2020) observed different participants, focusing on pre-service and in-service teachers who have been part of an EU project, instead of teacher educators.

In her study, Hofmann (2020) suggests the term 'collegiality' to describe one key element of successful international cooperation. With this, she refers to the atmosphere within a team or group, the mutual trust and intimacy. Active participation and the power of co-decisions were aspects that Hofmann found to be essential for a high level of collegiality. Hofmann argues that collegiality can promote a critical and an analytical exchange of experiences. Nevertheless, the author raises the question of whether collegiality can to some extent prevent criticism and constructive conflicts, as participants in her study described that they were hesitant to address problems when having a highly positive collegial relationship. In the proPIC project, we think that the high level of collegiality was due to the fact that all partners were notably motivated to be a part of this project right from the start, but also got on well on the personal level. Furthermore, everybody seemed to be content with the project setting, its less hierarchical structures and general management. The only factors participants voiced as limiting were external factors that were no 'fault' of the consortium itself but rooted in the individual context (e.g. no recognition by colleagues from the particular institution). Yet, we would like to pose the question: To what extent can collegiality be supportive, as well as restraining, in regard to a team or group which is perceived as successful?

5.2. Fostering transnational dialogue and exchange

A second relevant aspect was to use these transient spaces to engage in a transnational experience and dialogue. In line with the findings of Lunenberg et al. (2017), our data show the benefits of using existing 'architectures' which facilitate collaboration among professionals. Based on this, a scaffolded and mediated frame can be helpful in gaining *professional orientation* in one's professional environment. Through collaborative learning, professionals further engage in dialogues and discussions in which they position themselves. They learn to express their views and to reflect on them. Further, they experience otherness and thus become more aware of their own context, but also of their own professional identity. By engaging in authentic and situated activities, professional practices can be promoted in the long run. Notwithstanding, we also see that the aspect of promoting sustainable *professional practices* can be difficult, especially in the context of a project-based transient transnational community where 'everything stops' at some point.

6. Conclusions

The evidence from this study suggests the systematic use of transient transnational communities offers potential benefits for teacher educators' own learning and development. Before being able to 'navigate the tensions between self, practice and context', as Kitchen and Russell (2012, p. 6) describe it, the findings here show that teacher educators first need to become more aware of and reflect on existing tensions, as well as on the role they play and would like to play in their own context. The significance of our contribution lies in highlighting the value of transnationalism and the impact it can have on the professional learning of teacher educators. We base this term on the work of Evans (2014) for whom professional learning is often contextual or situated, less intentional than professional development and can occur unexpectedly and implicitly (ibid., p. 3). Like professionalism, we view professional learning as being multidimensional, which often takes place in interaction with others. Based on our findings, we define this *transnational professional learning* as authentic, partly scaffolded and evidence-based learning across national boundaries in which professionals from diverse cultural and possibly occupational backgrounds collaboratively engage, which is thus social and intercultural in nature. By engaging in these learning experiences, the following three elements can be fostered:

- 1) professional awareness,
- 2) professional orientation,
- 3) professional practices.

We are convinced that making transnational professional learning more situated and embedded in teacher educators' everyday life will help teacher educators become more active and critical in their own professional development.

To further our research, we intend to investigate more thoroughly what impacts the engagement in transient transnational communities in a transnational context has on the professional identity of teacher educators. Additionally, future work will concentrate on a concrete model of transnational professional learning as well as practical implications. In general, our findings stress the importance of continued research into how teacher educators can be supported more systematically in their professional learning and development.

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