



Teacher education communities of practice: More than a culture of collaboration



Kevin Patton ^{a, *}, Melissa Parker ^b

^a Department of Kinesiology, California State University, Chico, CA, USA

^b Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland

HIGHLIGHTS

- Engagement in communities of practice provided a foundation for collaboration and reduced isolation.
- Social dynamics and group processes shaped community practices.
- Results support the rethinking of professional development in higher education.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 May 2016

Received in revised form

19 April 2017

Accepted 11 June 2017

Keywords:

Communities of practice

Teacher education

Physical education teacher education

Professional development

Professional learning

ABSTRACT

Teacher educator professional learning, like teacher education, can be messy and complex. This study's purpose was to explore physical education teacher educators' understandings of how their participation in communities of practice (CoP) supported their own professional development. More specifically, significant dynamics and group processes of CoP were explored. Results indicated that engagement in CoP provided a foundation for collaboration and reduced isolation, allowing participants to extend teaching and research capacities. Significant social dynamics and group processes that shaped their practice included a common focus, personal and professional relationships, safe but challenging spaces, and shared commitment.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The notion of professional development of teacher educators has begun to emerge as a touchstone for not only what it means to become a teacher educator, but also to learn as a teacher educator. (Loughran, 2014, p.217)

Teacher educator professional learning, like teacher education, can be messy and complex. As a result, developing as teacher educators, “committed to both practice and scholarship requires mentoring and professional development support” (Gallagher, Griffin, Parker, Kitchen, & Figg, 2011, p. 880). Yet, content specific professional development for teacher educators is rare (Berry, 2009; Cole, 1999; Murray, 2005). Because professional

development programs are low on the priority list in most university settings, teacher educators themselves are forced to seek professional learning opportunities alone or collectively (Gallagher et al., 2011), most frequently, taking their professional learning into their own hands (Swennen & Bates, 2010). As indicated in Loughran's (2014) opening quote, teacher educator professional development serves as a trademark for becoming and learning as a teacher educator, holding with it the potential to make a significant impact on the preparation of future teachers.

While the professional development of teachers has been extensively studied (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009), little is known about how teacher educators develop professionally (Smith, 2003). In fact, teacher educators themselves remain an, “under-researched, poorly understood, and ill-defined occupational group” (Murray, 2016, p. 35). It is only recently that the teacher educators' professional development has come to be a topic of both interest and concern (Bates, Swennen, & Jones, 2011). Furthermore, Kosnik, Miyata, Cleovoulou, Fletcher, and Menna (2015) provide a

* Corresponding author. Department of Kinesiology, California State University, 255 Yolo Hall, 400 West First Street, Chico, CA 95929, USA.

E-mail address: kpatton@csuchico.edu (K. Patton).

compelling argument for discipline specific studies of teacher educators, indicating the work of teacher educators is multifaceted and therefore studies, “need to capture the complexity of their work by examining their identities, practices, backgrounds, transition, challenges, individual talents, and contexts” (p. 217).

1.1. *Life as a teacher educator*

While there are exceptions, academic life as a teacher educator has been portrayed as lonely and personally demanding (Hadar & Brody, 2010); characterized by stress, pressure, and uncertainty (Austin, 2002). Expectations of colleges and universities in which teacher educators work, serve, at times unwittingly, to add to the uncertainty by conveying conflicting messages. In one instance, they represent, “a culture of competition among institutions, among programs and among faculty” where “cooperation is often not only difficult to achieve but rarely rewarded” (Diamond, 2006; para. 4). Yet, in others, they are a place where conversations and connections are viewed as a necessity for program development and professional growth (Cole, 1999).

Research indicates that, when provided the opportunity, teacher educators prefer to work with colleagues (Shagrir, 2010) and while the programmatic and research benefits of collaboration are well documented (Graber, 1993; MacPhail, Patton, Parker & Tannehill, 2014; Pennington, Prusak, & Wilkinson, 2014), the organization of colleges and universities sometimes hampers informal and open dialogue while surreptitiously promoting individuality over collegiality. For example, the junctures to engage in more than casual conversation regarding teaching and student learning or other classroom challenges, quandaries, and ‘ah-ha’ moments are few (Berry, 2009; Gallagher et al., 2011; Hadar & Brody, 2010). In some situations, most “interaction among faculty is often limited to cordial everyday talk” (Hadar & Brody, 2010) and “collegial interchange frequently stops at the classroom door” (p. 1643).

1.2. *Professional development for teacher educators*

To address the unique working conditions and expectations of teacher educators, professional development must be “purposefully conceptualized, thoughtfully implemented, and meaningfully employed” (Loughran, 2014, p. 10) to support growth and change (Hadar & Brody, 2010). Smith (2003) identifies the myriad of professional competencies required of teacher educators to include, but not limited to “content, pedagogical, organizational, group dynamic and communicative and developmental and personal growth” (p.202). In addition to their teaching roles, teacher educators are expected to conduct and disseminate research, add to the teacher education knowledge base, develop reciprocal collaborations with schools, and promote education in general (Oser, 1998; Smith, 2003). The trajectory of a teacher educator’s professional development is, therefore, “not limited to expanded theoretical knowledge in a specific subject matter, but it is more a whole person development with cognitive and affective aspects” (Smith, 2003, p.203). This view of professional development is therefore not constrained to time-defended, intentional activities meant to achieve specific goals or standards—rather it is a way of life (Barak, Gidron, & Turniansky, 2010).

Physical education literature reflects a relative absence of contemporary research on the professional journeys of physical education teacher educators (Graber, Templin, & Metzler, 2015; McAvoy, MacPhail, & Heikinaro-Johansson, 2015). Similar to teacher education in general (Kosnik et al., 2015), physical education and as an extension physical education teacher education (PETE), has long been described as a marginalized profession (Pagnano, 2011). Exacerbating PETE marginalization in higher

education is a sense of isolation, as there are frequently only one or two physical education teacher educators in a single university setting, and PETE in many universities is housed outside of schools of education (Ayers & Housner, 2008). Thus, opportunities to engage in discourse about teacher education in these settings are limited.

Providing a conceptual framework with which to expand our knowledge of physical education teacher educators, Lawson (1991) suggested future research including influences on and questions about their work lives, role orientations, productivity, and affiliations. Using Lawson’s suggestions as a starting point, McAvoy et al. (2015) completed a review of literature on physical education teacher educators (1990–2014). In particular, they noted scant attention to paradigmatic and occupational communities to which physical education teacher educators belong, highlighting an almost 20 year void in studies focusing on, “how, why, or to what end PE teacher educators enact the scholarly aspect of their professional work” (p.172).

It is widely accepted that being part of a community, network, or team offers one of the most powerful modes of professional development (MacPhail et al., 2014; Parker, Patton, & Tannehill, 2012); suggesting that learning between members is even more powerful than individual learning (Barak et al., 2010). Participation within a community provides a space for authentic conversations, where members find reinforcement in and challenge each other’s experiences and stories (Gallagher et al., 2011). Further, knowledge creation is social, produced through meaningful dialog and conversations that occur within communities (Barak et al., 2010). Knowledge creation, therefore, is a non-linear process where, “new ideas and innovations emerge between rather than within people” (Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2004, p. 564).

1.3. *Communities of practice*

Many educational theorists have promoted learning as participation (e.g., Dewey, 1916; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schön, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). In these situations learning is assumed to be social and situated; often occurring in informal contexts such as communities through interaction, communication, taking part, and gaining access to different contexts (Quennerstedt & Maivorsdotter, 2017). In recent literature, communities of practice (CoP) represent a promising theme in the professional development of teacher educators (Brody & Hadar, 2011; Hadar & Brody, 2010; Swennen & Bates, 2010). While different interpretations of CoP make it challenging to apply the concept in meaningful ways (Boylan, 2010); it nonetheless provides a powerful framework for examining teacher educator learning. In one conceptualization, CoP are a social organization in which learning and participation takes place (Boylan, 2010). As such CoP “are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015; p. 1). Describing differences in configuration of CoP in practice, Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, (2015; p. 3) stated:

They come in a variety of forms. Some are quite small; some are very large, often with a core group and many peripheral members. Some are local and some cover the globe. Some meet mainly face-to-face, some mostly online. Some are within an organization and some include members from various organizations. Some are formally recognized, often supported with a budget; and some are completely informal and even invisible.

These varied communities serve multiple purposes including professional learning, increased research productivity, enhanced instruction, and promotion of school improvement (Borko, 2004;

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4941590>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4941590>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)