

Pre-service Teachers' Views of Their Training: Key Issues to Sustain Quality Teacher Education

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Abstract

This paper draws upon data from a broader piece of research aimed at examining pre-service teachers' views of their initial teacher education within the context of a master's degree programme in teaching. The data were collected through questionnaires and written narratives at the beginning and at the end of the programme. In this paper, the data arising from 47 narratives at the end of the programme are presented. Five categories emerged from the qualitative data: curriculum content, teaching practice, the role of teacher educators, teaching and learning methods, the organisational aspects and structure of the programme. Although the participants identified positive aspects of the initial teacher education programme, they also stress that there is room for improvement, especially with regard to a greater coherence of the curriculum and a better articulation of its different components. Implications of the findings for enhancing the quality of initial teacher education and the role of teachers' educators are discussed.

Key words: initial teacher education, student teachers, teaching practice

Investigating Teacher Education: Context and Content

Initial teacher education (ITE) is seen as a 'long continuum' within a lifelong perspective (Flores, 2000; Marcelo, 1999) and as the first step of a career-long process only preparing for entry into the teaching profession. Research has identified the challenges and experiences of student teachers in becoming teachers moving from the role of preservice teachers to beginning teachers (Flores, 2001; Flores & Day, 2006; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Schepens, Aelterman, & Vlerick, 2009). These studies have demonstrated that the development of teachers' professional identity is influenced by personal, social and cognitive response as it implies an "ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 220).

The need to restructuring ITE programmes in order to meet the demands of a more and more challenging profession and a changing society are also identified in the literature. However, changes in training programmes as a result of national and international policies have to be understood in the contexts in which they were produced (Flores, 2011; Townsend, 2011). Like other European countries, ITE in Portugal has been subject to a process of restructuring as a result of the Bologna process. This has implied debates about the nature of teaching as a profession and the kinds of teachers that are to be trained within the context of current school curricula and the challenges facing the Portuguese society (Flores, 2011). Underpinning given ITE programmes are conceptions of education, teaching and learning, of the role of schools and society, as well as the kinds of teachers that are to be trained (Flores, 2004; Marcelo, 1999).

Higher professional qualification, curricula based upon learning outcomes in the light of teacher performance, research-based qualification, the importance of teaching practice (observation and collaboration in teaching situations under the supervision of a mentor/supervisor), school-university partnerships, quality assurance of teachers' qualification and of ITE are the key assumptions of the new policy in the Portuguese context (Ministério da Educação [Ministry of Education], 2007).

In order to become a teacher in Portugal, a master's degree in teaching is mandated. In other words, ITE occurs at the level of second cycle after the first three-year degree programme called "Licenciatura". A master's degree in teaching, a two-year programme (for secondary school teachers), includes: i) training in the subject matter; ii) general educational training; iii) specific didactics (for a given level of teaching and subject matter); iv) cultural, social and ethical dimension and v) professional practice. The separation between training at the first cycle (a three-year programme called "Licenciatura") and training at the second cycle level (a master's degree which is now needed in order to enter the teaching profession) has been seen as a drawback from previous models of teacher education. This previous integrated programme model consisted of four to five years of training during which student teachers studied the educational sciences and subject matter simultaneously from the very beginning of the programme and one year of practicum at school (Flores, 2014; Flores, Vieira, & Ferreira, 2014).

Recent changes point to an increase in the importance of subject knowledge and didactics along with longer study programmes for pre-service teachers at the master's level (Ministério da Educação e Ciência [Ministry of Education and Science], 2014). "Curriculum Development", "Sociology of Education and the Teaching Profession", "Methodology of Teaching" among many others are the examples of curricular units in the master's degree study programme. This perspective of professional training results in reduced time and space for practicum (which occurs only at the master's level) with implications for the pedagogical activities in which student teachers are able to engage. This separation of two cycles of studies ("Licenciatura" plus a master's degree in teaching) in ITE has had implications for the development of professional knowledge and identity of pre-service teachers. In this regard, Moreira and Vieira (2012) argue that "the impact of this structural change is not yet clear; will second-cycle student teachers take teaching more seriously because they had more time to decide to become teachers, or will they take it less seriously because their training is shorter? And will they be able to integrate subject and pedagogical knowledge now that these curricular components are clearly separated?" (p. 97). It was within this context that the present study was carried out

taking into account the most recent changes in ITE curriculum, but also existing research literature that will be described briefly in the next section.

The Importance of ITE

ITE has been investigated from a variety of perspectives aimed at analysing pre-service teachers' experiences and perceptions about their training and understanding the multidimensional, idiosyncratic and contextual process of becoming a teacher (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Flores, 2001; Flores & Day, 2006; Hauge, 2000). For instance, Al-Hassan, Al-Barakat and Al-Hassan's study (2012) of pre-service teachers' perceptions of their field experience in kindergartens and schools in Jordan identified difficulties in dealing with children's behaviour, with children's parents and with the ways in which some cooperating teachers, headteachers and administrators treated them. Difficulties related to the placement in kindergartens and schools and to feedback and assessment by university supervisors were identified in the same study as well as differences between theory and practice. However, student teachers saw their teaching practice as an opportunity to get to know the workplace, to gain first-hand experience, to observe teachers, to receive advice and guidance from teachers, to plan and teach classes and to deal directly with children.

Hindi (2006) identified the failure of supervisory visits and feedback given to pre-service teachers. The lack of information about the teaching practice was pointed out. In this regard, Wing-Mui, May-Hung and Chiao-Liang (1996) argue for the discussion of issues such as the quality and quantity of feedback given to student teachers. Al-Barakat (2003) found that student teachers considered their field experience very reduced, as well as the unawareness of the supervisory role from the part of cooperating teachers and headteachers.

Smith and Hodson's study (2010) on theorising practice with a group of trainees on the employment-based graduate teacher programme in the United Kingdom, at the end of their ITE, points to the relevance of both theoretical and practical components. The study concluded that theory learned at the university was useful and influenced their practice in a positive way, as a framework and support for teaching. Benefits of learning from experience were identified, and these include the opportunity to observe colleagues' teaching, the possibility of raising questions about others' practice, teamwork, the possibility to teach independently and to get to know the class and students' reactions to trainees' teaching.

In England, Sangster and Green (2012) studied alternative placement experiences for student teachers undertaking primary initial teacher training that dealt with teaching pupils outside the age stage for which student teachers studied. Findings suggest that teaching practice was seen as an opportunity that enabled them to develop both professionally and personally, making them reflective practitioners. Amongst other issues, they identified learning from other experts, working with colleagues, gaining confidence to teach, experiencing other cultural settings, working with children in informal settings, the importance of personalising learning and experiencing second language teaching as the most important advantages of the placement experience. Kershner and Hargreaves' study (2012) of pre-service teachers' contributions to research on primary school children's beliefs about knowledge and knowing (for instance, epistemological beliefs) highlighted

the “research position held by student teachers in crossing boundaries between school and university contexts” (p. 275), as well as “the particular relevance of the research topic for illuminating the out-of-school knowledge integral to children’s sense of self and learning” (p. 275). In fact, student teachers tended to be encouraged to engage in school-based research (enquiring and critical role) in order to improve their learning and professional development towards their roles as “reflective, research-informed practitioners” (Kershner & Hargreaves, 2012, p. 275). This same study identified knowledge construction (through dialogue, motivation, engagement and environmental support), knowledge transfer (between lessons, schools and inside and outside school) and knowledge use (understanding self and other perspectives and preparation for school transition and later life) as three epistemological concerns evident in pre-service teachers’ research projects characterised by dialogic connections.

Tang, Wong and Cheng (2012) in their study of professional learning in ITE show that student teachers attending a bachelor’s degree study programme ‘Education’ in Hong Kong held a constructivist vision and conception of teaching and learning based on students’ construction of knowledge and capacity for lifelong learning. This was the result of their learning experiences during the ITE programme, including the core components of the formal curriculum, informal and hidden curriculum, field experience and non-local experiences. In terms of degree of influence on the conception of teaching and learning, field experience was the most influential one, followed by the formal, informal and hidden curriculum.

The current model of ITE in the Portuguese context implies less time spent in schools during the teaching practice making the development of pedagogical projects in school more difficult. The existing literature has also shown the ITE curriculum fragmentation and lack of coherence of its key components (Flores, 2011), the mismatch between theory and practice, as well as the lack of adequate preparation to face the day-to-day professional practice at school (Flores, 2000; Flores & Day, 2006). The perception that ITE is mainly theoretical and disconnected from the real world of schools has been identified in research literature (Ebby, 2000; Flores, 2001, 2006). In this regard, Formosinho (2009) stresses the emphasis on the academic-oriented logic prevailing in many initial teacher education programmes which is associated with knowledge fragmentation and with the existence of subject-related territories linked to university departments (Formosinho, 2009) which, in turn, hinders teaching co-ordination and curriculum articulation (Vieira, Flores, & Ferreira, 2012).

The Study: Goals, Participants and Methods

This paper draws on data from a larger piece of research looking at the key components of ITE in order to understand pre-service teachers’ views and experiences on the ITE programme, including teaching practice as a result of the implementation of the Bologna process. The exploratory study reported in this paper was based on the following research questions: *How do pre-service teachers view their initial teacher education programme? How and what do they learn during ITE?*

Data were collected through written narratives at the end of the two-year programme. The goals of the study were presented to all pre-service teachers at the end of the second year of their studies, and some volunteers were invited to participate. The aim was to

understand their perceptions about and experiences on their training during the ITE programme. The narratives (approximately two pages each) included pre-service teachers' overall evaluation of the programme, the ways in which they view its key components and their learning experience throughout the course, including suggestions for improvement. The key emerging themes were used to develop the following phases of the wider project.

In total, 47 pre-service teachers volunteered to write narratives about their ITE experience at the end of the second year of the master's degree programme. Of these, 10 are male students, and 37 are female students aged 22–45 years. Participants studied in different programmes (a two-year master's level programme): "Portuguese and Spanish", "Portuguese and Classical Languages", "Philosophy", "Maths", "Biology and Geology", "Physical Education", "History and Geography", "English and Spanish" (Table 1). The written narratives were collected in May 2011 and 2012.

The process of qualitative data analysis was undertaken according to a vertical analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994): each of the narratives was analysed separately, and there was a comparative or horizontal analysis (cross-case analysis) (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to look for similarities as well as differences. In this paper, five emerging themes are presented: i) curriculum content; ii) teaching practice; iii) role of teacher educators; iv) organisational aspects and structure of the programme; v) teaching and learning methods.

Table 1
Participants

	Frequency	%
Gender		
Female	37	78,7%
Male	10	21,3%
Age Range		
[20–25]	23	50%
[26–30]	9	19,6%
[31–35]	9	19,6%
[36–40]	3	6,5%
[41–45]	2	4,3%
ITE Programme		
Portuguese and Spanish	14	29,8%
Portuguese and Classical Languages	9	19,1%
Philosophy	7	14,9%
Maths	7	14,9%
Biology and Geology	3	6,4%
Physical Education	3	6,4%
History and Geography	2	4,3%
English and Spanish	2	4,3%

Findings

Findings are analysed according to five main categories which emerged from pre-service teachers' accounts at the end of their ITE programme: curriculum content, teaching practice, the role of teacher educators, organisational aspects and structure of the programme and teaching and learning methods. Pre-service teachers also identified suggestions for improvement of their initial teacher education programme which are explored later in this paper.

Table 2 presents the categories emerging from the participants' accounts. Curriculum content and teaching practice are the most recurring categories.

Table 2
Most Recurring Categories Emerging from Pre-service Teachers' Accounts

	Frequency
Curriculum content	41
Teaching practice	36
Role of teacher educators	23
Organisational aspects and structure of the programme	20
Teaching and learning methods	15

Curriculum Content

Curriculum content was one of the emerging categories mentioned by pre-service teachers when they looked back on their ITE programme. In general, they highlighted the adequacy and relevance of given subjects/modules:

Some of the curricular units are important and adequate to meet students' needs. (ST33)

The curricular units are very interesting and relevant for the future teaching career. (ST34)

However, some of them also identified some negative features related to the content of the curriculum of their ITE programme, namely the lack of adequacy, relevance and articulation between given subject matter/modules, duplication in content, which they associate with poor organisation of the given modules and the gap between theory and practice, especially in regard to the modules delivered in the second year of the programme concomitantly with teaching practice at school:

Some modules are of little interest and make you waste your time. It would be more useful to invest in your teaching practice. (ST21)

In some modules, contents overlap. (ST23)

Subjects are distant from schools' reality, and they remain very theoretical. (ST26)

There is a poor articulation between subject matter and modules. (ST32)

Given modules do not always meet the needs of the teaching practice. (ST33)

Teaching Practice

Teaching practice was a key issue in the participants' accounts. By and large, they highlighted a number of positive issues related to their teaching practice, such as the practical component and the good interaction with university supervisors and cooperating teachers in schools. They stressed the opportunity to teach, classroom observation, interaction with pupils, the contact with school reality and the development of professional competencies in practice as positive aspects. This is in line with previous empirical work (Flores & Day, 2006; Tang et al., 2012).

The most important learning experiences related the teaching practice, especially in regard to the interaction with pupils, the possibility to develop a critical discussion with the university supervisors and cooperating teachers. (ST5)

During my second year, I would stress the possibility to observe cooperating teachers' lessons and to teach a group of pupils. (ST21)

There is no doubt that the intervention in a real context with real students was of paramount importance as far as the development of personal and professional abilities and competencies is concerned. (ST30)

However, most of the pre-service teachers also identified a number of negative aspects. One of the most recurring comments centred on their belief that teaching practice was too short with implications for the development and evaluation of the pedagogical intervention project in schools as well as for the final report of pre-service teachers' experience in a real context. During teaching practice, pre-service teachers observe in classrooms and develop a 'pedagogical project' in a school, under the supervision of the co-operating school teachers and university supervisors. Throughout the second year, pre-service teachers attend seminars and modules that are supposed to support the development of the 'pedagogical project' in light of their needs and interests (for instance, curriculum project, learning environments, pupils' behavioural problems etc.).

I think the duration of teaching practice is too short. You should have more time to observe and to teach pupils at school as this is one of the most important components of your learning to become a teacher. Teaching practice should be longer and you should have the possibility to teach more lessons. (ST8)

Because the teaching practice is too short, you cannot develop your intervention project as you would like to. It becomes a very restricted project related to a specific area and to a given reality. (ST28)

In the second year of the ITE programme, you have to undertake a number of practical tasks, and there is no connection among them or between them and your intervention project. Some of them are useless, and, most importantly, they do not have any connection with your pedagogical intervention project in the school. And, on the top of that, little time is left for you to develop and evaluate your intervention project during your teaching practice. (ST47)

Some participants identified the following as negative aspects: the delay in receiving information about placements for their field experience; the lack of coordination amongst departments, university supervisors and coordinators within the context of their teaching practice; the mismatch between given subjects/modules and pre-service teachers' needs

related to their teaching practice and the poor consolidation of the teaching practice model.

Subjects and modules are important in the first year of the programme, but this is not the case with the subjects and modules during the second year of your studies. Some of them are useless and not relevant to your teaching practice. And you feel that you waste your time with them. You could invest your energy and time in your teaching practice in schools and in your final report. (ST15)

One of the most negative experiences during my teaching practice is the fact that subjects and modules in the second year of the programme do not always meet your needs during your teaching practice. (ST33)

I think that there is no coordination between university and school. In other words, subjects should be articulated with teaching and with the project development during your teaching practice. And my experience is not positive in this regard. (ST46)

The Role of Teacher Educators

One recurring element in pre-service teachers' accounts related to the role of teacher educators. In general, the participants held a positive view of teacher educators' work. They stress their quality, the guidance and support provided by them, their commitment and availability and the quality of the interaction between pre-service teachers and their educators.

One of the most positive experiences related to the good interaction with some teacher educators. They are there for you, and their teaching is really relevant for your training as a teacher to be. They have shown different ways of doing teaching and research on teaching. (ST3)

In general, I think one positive feature is the good quality of teacher educators. (ST31)

I would like to stress the commitment and support from teacher educators in different subjects and modules. (ST33)

You can tell that some teacher educators are committed to their work and they want to support and guide you the best they can. (ST35)

I think the most important feature is the good guidance provided by teacher educators and also the opportunity to share experiences with them. (ST41)

However, some participants also identified negative features in regard to teacher educators' role. They spoke of the poor work of some teacher educators which they relate to the lack of scientific preparation and skills and difficulties in communicating with pre-service teachers; the lack of guidance and support and the lack of articulation among them and in their practices during the training programme. They also referred to the poor quality of feedback. This supports earlier research which has identified difficulties related to supervisors' role and feedback (Al-Barakat, 2003; Al-Hassan et al., 2012; Flores, 2014).

I think that some teacher educators do not care for you as pre-service teachers and are not concerned with your future as teachers. (ST3)

The most negative aspect relates to the lack of guidance and of clear assessment criteria to assess your work in the modules. (ST17)

Some teacher educators are too demanding, but there is something missing in their teaching. (ST20)

Organisational Aspects and Structure of the Programme

With regard to the organisational aspects and structure of the programme, pre-service teachers highlighted the good facilities, the adequate workload and the timetable. These two last issues are mainly related to the first year of the programme. However, some participants identified the structure of the ITE programme as a negative feature due to the lack of coherence and connection of the subjects and modules and between these and the teaching practice in the second year of the programme. The schedule of the given modules, especially in the second year, and the heavy workload are also mentioned by most of the participants. This is associated with the number of modules that pre-service teachers have to undertake in the second year at university while they are on teaching practice placement at schools. This represents a burden for them to comply with all the demands of both components which pre-service teachers also relate to their lack of articulation. In other words, the modules that are expected to support their teaching practice in the second year often imply doing extra work without any kind of connection with their pedagogical project in schools.

I think that the most positive issues are the adequate facilities, the city where the university is located and support facilities. (ST19)

The existence of several modules in second year of the programme means confusion and heavy work load for you. (ST15)

Teaching and Learning Methods

Teaching and learning methods was another recurring dimension emerging from pre-service teachers' accounts. In general, they highlighted the diversity of teaching and learning methods within the formal curriculum of their ITE programme and the research and reflective component, which is one of the key issues of the new curriculum of ITE after the restructuring process. Pre-service teachers are expected to acquire research and reflective competencies which are to be developed throughout the programme. These are to be mobilised during the design and development of their pedagogical project in the context of their teaching practice in the second year of their studies.

I think that one of the major features of the programme is the diversity of teaching and learning methods. (ST15)

The most important thing is the possibility of reflecting pedagogically and methodologically on issues related to teaching and to the content of the subject matter that you are going to teach. (ST21)

In my opinion, the key issues of the programme are the concern with the methodological component; the provision of a large cultural background and the modules where there is discussion and analysis of what is happening in schools at the moment. (ST23)

The main positive features are the contact with schools' reality, teaching of didactical sequences, collaborative work and a strong emphasis on the research and reflective component. (ST28)

One of the key learning experiences for me was the questioning of several teaching methods and their influence on pupils' leaning. (ST44)

However, two negative issues were also identified. Inadequate teaching methods from the part of some teacher educators and the lack of pre-service teachers' autonomy emerged from their accounts.

I think that sometimes there is lack of information and some inconsistencies which are to be related to the lack of coordination among teacher educators and the lack of pre-service teachers' autonomy. (ST33)

My main criticism relates to the poor approach to teaching from the part of some teacher educators, the irrelevant academic work and assignments in some subjects/modules. (ST39)

Suggestions for Improvement

In their accounts pre-service teachers provided many suggestions to improve the quality of the ITE programme. In general, they spoke of issues related to curriculum content and organisation, teaching practice, teacher educators, assessment and organisation aspects. With regard to curriculum content and organisation, the participants highlighted the need to rethink the sequence of given study courses/modules, to review the importance and content of given study courses/modules and to improve their practical component. They stressed the need for a greater articulation amongst study courses/modules, a better clarification of the programme and a more rigorous and clearer content for given subjects and modules.

Regarding teaching practice, they stressed the need to increase the number of hours dedicated to teaching, greater articulation between teaching practice and the study courses/modules in the second year of their studies and a better organisation of the teaching practice. Pre-service teachers think improvement is needed concerning the work of some teacher educators. In particular, they highlighted the necessity for greater articulation in their practice, for greater support and for better clarification and coordination of the programme, especially as far as the modules of the second year of their studies are concerned. Issues related to assessment and organisation of the programme were also identified, specifically the need to review the assessment methods and criteria, more control on pre-service teachers' assiduity, reducing the workload and improving the schedule in the second year of their studies.

I think that the second semester of the second year of my studies should be devoted only to the teaching practice. (ST13)

The study courses and modules should only be included in the first year of the programme. In the second year, the teaching practice and seminars are more than enough. (ST21)

I think that there is a need for a better organisation, because there are many inconsistencies in regard to the lack of coherence and articulation among study courses/ modules. (ST27)

Teacher educators should meet in order to have a better coordination. Deadlines for handing in assignments should be defined in advance. (ST43)

In my opinion, the different modules need to be more articulated, and teacher educators should be more concerned with the work that is developed during the training programme. (ST44)

Teacher educators should organise their work better in order to get a better articulation between the modules and the teaching practice, especially with the pedagogical intervention project in the second year of the study programme. (ST47)

Conclusion and Discussion

This study set out to analyse the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding their ITE programme. In general, they highlighted a number of positive issues which they relate to curriculum content, namely teaching practice and the role of teacher educators. Organisational aspects and teaching and learning methods were also referenced by the participants. In particular, they stressed the adequacy and relevance of study courses/modules, the interaction with supervisors and cooperating teachers, the opportunity to teach, the interaction of the pupils, the development of professional competencies, the quality of teacher educators, the guidance and support provided by teacher educators and their commitment. Other issues are associated with the diversity of teaching and learning methods they experience during their ITE programme and the research and reflective component along with good facilities.

However, a number of negative features were also identified, particularly the lack of connection between given study courses/modules, the gap between theory and practice, duplication in content, the length of the teaching practice, the lack of articulation between university and school, the lack of coordination amongst departments, supervisors and coordinators of the teaching practice and the mismatch between given study courses/modules in the second year of the study programme and pre-service teachers' needs during their teaching practice. Regarding the role of some teacher educators, the participants highlighted the lack of guidance and support, the lack of articulation between some of the components of the programme and the poor quality of feedback from some teacher educators. They also discussed the structure of the ITE programme and the heavy workload in the second year of the study programme.

These findings resonate with earlier research (Al-Barakat, 2003; Al-Hassan et al., 2012; Flores, 2000; Flores, 2014; Flores & Day, 2006) and raise implications for improving the ITE programmes. In general, more attention needs to be given to the adequacy and coherence of the various components of ITE programme and the ways in which teacher educators view their work and role. This may be approached through careful

programme design, elaborated view of the intended process of teachers' learning, specific pedagogical approaches and investment in the quality of staff members (Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006). It further implies a reflective and articulated work on the part of teacher educators in order to make their views and beliefs about teacher education, teaching, learning and being a teacher educator more explicit (Flores, 2014). In this regard, it is worth noting that a group of teacher educators has been involved in a study group to analyse their institution's training model and to discuss and disseminate training practices. The aim is to develop a research culture on and in ITE, a scholarship of teacher education to better understand what and why teacher educators undertake given practices as well as questioning their rationale and their implications (Flores et al., 2014).

A closer relationship between university and school needs to be explored further to enhance the potential of the teaching practice. While each entity has different views, perspectives and practices regarding teaching practice, it is recognised as a key element in ITE (Flores et al., 2014). This improved relationship may well contribute to better articulation between theory and practice in ITE. The gap between theory and practice has been identified in the literature as one of the main challenges in teacher education (Elstad, 2010; Korthagen, 2010). In this regard, pre-service teachers' beliefs and previous experiences should be made visible, analysed and challenged (Paulin as cited in Malm, 2009). As Flores (2001) states, learning to teach "is a process that goes beyond the mere application of a set of acquired techniques and skills. Not only does it imply the mastery of practical and more technical issues, but it also encompasses the construction of knowledge and meaning in an ongoing dialogue with the practice" (p. 146).

Participants in this study identified two key elements in the new curriculum for ITE in the Portuguese context – the reflective component and the research component – as positive features. However, the development of these components need to be made more explicit and articulated with the other dimensions of the programme. According to Contreras (1997) and Zeichner (1993), being a teacher means having not only technical knowledge and skills, but also having critical and reflective ideas about the teacher's professionalism. In this context, Loughran (2009) highlights the relevance of the relationship between research on teaching and teaching research in teacher education as key aspects in order to move forward both teaching and teacher education and to encourage all participants to value more the nature of their work. Cochran-Smith (2005) asserts that a consistent vision, strong collaboration between universities and school/community fieldwork, and effective use of certain teacher education strategies are amongst the distinctive features in ITE programmes and will allow the reflective and research components to be developed.

It is then important to emphasise the professional logic within ITE (Formosinho, 2009) which implies the assumption of the role of teacher educators and a greater attention to the professional context and to the professional dimensions of their teaching (Flores, 2011). Opportunities for professional development should be provided to teacher educators in order for them to analyse and reflect on their practices and on their role in order to foster, in turn, more significant opportunities for the development pre-service teachers' professional identity within ITE. This has been the focus of a group of teacher educators who have been engaging in a study group in order to analyse and to reflect in a more systematic way not only on their practice in line with the self-study perspective, but also on the current ITE model (Loughran, 2009; Lunenberg, Zwart, & Korthagen, 2010). This may well contribute to overcome some of the limitations of the current

model in order to “support the link between experience and theory in ways that are responsive to the expectations, needs and practices of teacher educators and student teachers” (Korthagen et al., 2006, p. 1037).

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