



Reforming teacher education in the context of lifelong learning: the case of the BEd degree programme in Ireland

Anne M. Dolan

To cite this article: Anne M. Dolan (2012) Reforming teacher education in the context of lifelong learning: the case of the BEd degree programme in Ireland, European Journal of Teacher Education, 35:4, 463-479, DOI: [10.1080/02619768.2012.696190](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2012.696190)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2012.696190>



Published online: 06 Jul 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 457



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 4 View citing articles [↗](#)

Reforming teacher education in the context of lifelong learning: the case of the BEd degree programme in Ireland

Anne M. Dolan*

Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland

Lifelong learning has become a prominent fixture in educational policy in recent years in many countries around the world. In terms of teacher education, it is now widely accepted that initial teacher education is insufficient for the lifelong professional needs of teachers. From September 2012, initial teacher education in Ireland will be offered as a radically different four-year BEd degree programme. This reform of initial teacher education offers immense potential for teacher educators to re-imagine their programmes in light of a range of guiding paradigms and theoretical frameworks, including lifelong learning. This paper provides a rationale for developing programmes in initial teacher education in the context of lifelong learning. A number of recommendations for lifelong primary teacher education are offered in light of current reforms that are taking place in Ireland.

Keywords: teacher education; lifelong learning; curriculum; policy; reflective practice

Introduction

The increasingly complex nature of teaching and teacher education has been well documented in the literature (OECD 2005). Commentators (Edwards, Stewart, and Strain 2002) have pointed out that a reliance on initial education is no longer sufficient in order to be able to respond to the level of rapid change in society. Hence, lifelong learning has emerged as one policy response to the needs of our changing society. However, the literature treats the two fields of teacher education and lifelong learning in a separate fashion, with some exceptions (Coolahan 2002; Day 1999; Dolan 2008; Skilbeck 2004). Therefore, a model of teacher education has yet to be developed to address the pervasive dissonance between principles of initial teacher education and lifelong learning.

The ideals of lifelong learning have been embraced by a range of policy makers at national, EU and international levels with a high level of consensus. While the concept of lifelong learning exists prominently in a range of policy documents, evidence of implementation is less impressive (Field 2006). According to Coolahan (2002) a paradigm shift is required in traditional educational planning to make the vision of lifelong learning become a reality for all, including teacher educators, student teachers and teachers.

*Email: anne.dolan@mic.ul.ie

In Ireland, the recently appointed Teaching Council,¹ with responsibility for accreditation of teacher education courses, heralds a significant milestone in Irish education. The Council, by acknowledging teachers as lifelong learners, has highlighted a fundamental link between teacher education and lifelong learning. However, lifelong learning itself is a contested term and it has been interpreted in many ways by commentators (Field 2006; Skilbeck 2004). This article aims to critique the discourse of lifelong learning and to explore its potential contribution to primary initial teacher education.

A decision to extend the duration of teacher education programmes in Ireland was recently announced by the Department of Education and Skills (2011b) and the Teaching Council (2011). According to the Teaching Council (2011) 'concurrent programmes should be a minimum of four years while post-graduate programmes of teacher education should take place over two years, thereby facilitating an innovative re-conceptualisation of current programmes' (14). Hence, the much needed reform of teacher education in Ireland is now officially on the agenda. It remains to be seen how teacher education will be re-conceptualised and what impact this will have on teachers and on the quality of education.

While this is a time of great potential and reform for initial teacher education, it is important to note that the landscape of teacher education has changed somewhat in recent years with the introduction of online teacher education provided by Hibernia College. Also, current reforms must be cognisant of the complex policy landscape that is shaping all spheres of education in Ireland, including the *National strategy for higher education* (Department of Education and Skills 2011a) and the *National strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people* (Department of Education and Skills 2011b). Delivering the planned reforms in initial teacher education will be even more challenging in light of the severe recession currently being experienced by Ireland.

This paper argues that in order to prepare student teachers for the challenges posed by global and societal changes in Ireland and elsewhere (Hargreaves 2003), initial teacher education programmes for primary teachers need to draw upon the theories and practices of lifelong learning in a fully informed manner. Following an overview of recent developments in initial primary teacher education in the Irish Republic, an argument is made for laying foundations for lifelong professional teacher education during initial primary teacher education. A lifelong learning imperative has been acknowledged by the Irish Teaching Council, particularly in light of the continuum of teacher development (Teaching Council 2011). Equally, the field of lifelong learning, often criticised for its aspirational nature, has much to gain from working explicitly with the providers of teacher education. This paper makes recommendations for the re-conceptualisation of initial primary teacher education as one phase of the life-wide teacher education continuum. While the continuum of teacher education also includes induction and continuous professional development for teachers, this paper deals specifically with initial primary teacher education as the first stage on the continuum. Recent developments in induction and in-service teacher education are beyond the scope of this paper, however they are important to mention in view of the lack of continuity that currently exists between the three aspects of teacher education in Ireland (Conway et al. 2007).

Defining lifelong learning

'Lifelong learning' has become a prominent fixture in educational policy in recent years in many countries around the world (Aspin 2001). The lifelong learning concept is based on three principles, which differentiate it from traditional notions of front-loaded formal education. According to Schuetze and Casey (2006) 'lifelong learning is life-long, life-wide and centred on "learning" rather than on "education" and on "educational institutions"' (279). Lifelong learning embraces all learning, including that which takes place both formally and informally within organisations, universities and colleges of education (Chapman and Aspin 1997). It has implications not only for adult education but also for all those involved in primary education, for colleges of education, for universities, for all students, for teachers and, indeed, for school children. However, different labels and different interpretations of the concept have existed since the idea of a radical reorganisation of education was considered and debated in the 1970s. These include *lifelong education* (UNESCO), *recurrent education* (OECD) and *education permanente* (Council of Europe). However, the *lifelong* concept, namely the idea that education should not be restricted to the earlier years of one's life, has been accepted by all of these international organisations (Schuetze 2006).

Hutchins, Illich, Faure and Schon among others are the founding thinkers of the contemporary learning society and lifelong learning discourse. Many of their ideas have been integrated into policy discourse, for example the EU recently published a progress report that reviews progress in the implementation of lifelong learning policies (Council of the European Union 2008). Nevertheless, many commentators, including Strain and Field (1997), believe that the original ideals of lifelong learning have been 'hijacked by economic and individualistic, corporatist, instrumentalist, universalist interests embodied in national governments and globalized financial institutions (of which the World Bank is a single example)' (143). Conversely, these critics also argue that the notion of a learning society provides us with a helpful way of making sense of the shifts required in the context of the profound changes associated with globalisation and other dynamics of social and economic change.

The learning society ideal incorporates four different discourses about learning, namely discourses about personal fulfilment, citizenship, social inclusion and social justice and work-related learning. According to Gewirtz (2008) each of these discourses has different ideological nuances, which can shape education programmes conservatively or progressively depending on the ideological stance held by individuals, institutions and governments.

While policies of lifelong learning are generally presented in positive terms, the concept itself has been criticised in the literature for being vague, overambitious and unrealistically aspirational. Part of the problem is conceptual in nature. Lifelong learning is such a broad concept that it is difficult to reach a clear, uncontested definition (Chapman and Aspin 1997). Skilbeck (2004) argues that because lifelong learning 'is such an amorphous concept it is resistant to clear cut categorisation and precise structuring' (39).

Authors such as Murphy (2000) call for a more critical analysis of lifelong learning in the context of the changing political economy of international relations. He sees lifelong learning as 'a manifestation of the industrialisation of education' (176–7), which does not occur in a benign context. He argues strongly for a critical understanding of the workings of the state, the market, the interplay between them

and the impact of this globalised backdrop on educational developments. Murphy essentially calls for a critical theory of lifelong learning within a world that is shaped by the forces of capitalism.

Also adopting a critical approach, Brine (2006) explores a number of European Commission documents from 1993 to 2006, which construct the discourses of lifelong learning and the knowledge economy. Her analysis generates two categories of learners: the high-knowledge-skill graduate or postgraduate and those without or with low knowledge skills. She looks at the concept of the 'knowledge economy' and 'knowledge society', arguing that while the two appear interchangeable and fluid, they are used in a consistent manner. The 'knowledge economy' is only used when referring to people with high knowledge skills and 'knowledge society' only refers to learners with low knowledge skills. According to her critique: 'beneath a cloak of "inherent goodness" lifelong learning is a discourse of competition, of personal striving, of constant becoming, of inclusion and exclusion of stratification that continues to (re) construct educational and labour market power relations based on gender, class and race and on disability, age and migrant/citizen status also' (663). This critique is also supported by literature that demonstrates the gendered nature of teacher education, teaching and, indeed, lifelong education itself (Leathwood and Frances 2006).

Commitment to lifelong learning in Ireland should be considered in its historical context. One of the most significant features of Irish society over recent centuries is the great desire for education by Irish people. Even during some of the darkest periods in Irish history, when people were evicted from their homes and poverty levels were significant, education was highly valued. The national state-aided school system was established in 1831 and the introduction of free post-primary education in 1967 has resulted in a remarkable improvement in the educational profile of the Irish population since that time. When free undergraduate fees were introduced in the mid-1990s the number of students enrolled in tertiary education soared. John Coolahan (1981, 2002, 2007), who has documented the history of education in Ireland, has remarked that the high value accorded to education by Irish people is quite unique, a hunger that he claims has continued to be a hallmark of Irish people. In the 1990s, this commitment to education extended to policy commitments for adult and continuing education. In 1996 and 1998, consultative fora were held on adult and continuing education, which shaped the first coherent policy on lifelong learning. Consequently two important documents, the Green Paper on Adult Education, *Adult education in an era of lifelong learning* (Department of Education and Science 1998) and the White Paper, *Learning for life* (Department of Education and Science 2000) were published. These documents represent official recognition for lifelong learning in an Irish context. More importantly, the policy documents draw attention to the official recognition by the state that its educational commitment extends to include all those in pre-school, formal education and those whom have left or may not have participated in initial formal education (Department of Education and Science 2000). The policy on lifelong learning includes a number of recommendations for higher education institutions to improve access for students including: modularisation of programmes, off-campus provision, recognition of prior learning, the development of access programmes and an increase in collaboration between colleges to share good practice and develop co-ordinated approaches (Department of Education and Science 2000). Notwithstanding success in relation to policy, the actual delivery of lifelong learning has been less successful. The

recently published *National strategy for higher education to 2030* (Department of Education and Skills 2011a) has noted Ireland's poor performance in lifelong learning compared to other EU countries and the inflexibility of Irish higher education.

In pursuit of a knowledge society/economy through lifelong learning

The creation of a knowledge economy has been a key part of European and Irish policy for some time. The *Lisbon strategy* (European Commission 2000a) of the European Union (EU) set itself the goal of becoming 'the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (3). In the *Irish national development plan* (Government of Ireland 2007), the Government expressed a commitment to focus on 'education and training, including lifelong learning, to develop a high-skilled, innovative and adaptable workforce for the knowledge economy' (46). However, it is significant that in both cases the strategy of achieving a knowledge-based economy has failed. In the case of Europe, a new strategy for sustainable growth and jobs, called *Europe 2020* (European Commission. 2010c) has replaced the *Lisbon strategy*. The new strategy was launched in the midst of the worst economic crisis in decades. In the case of Ireland, the country's economy is struggling to survive as it has moved into an extended period of 'recession, deflation and economic contraction' (Drudy 2010, 37).

While concepts such as the 'knowledge economy' or related terms such as 'knowledge society', 'knowledge based-economy' and the 'information society' have been integrated into various policy documents, they are highly contested and much debated terms. In spite of its long lineage, there is still a lot of controversy among scholars as to what the knowledge economy and associated labels really mean for society – whether it leads to a professionalised society or a controlling society (Webster 2002). Interpretations of the knowledge economy or the knowledge society range from narrow instrumental visions of enterprise and the preparation of a well-trained workforce (World Bank 2009) to the creation of a society that values the more holistic development of individuals (Hargreaves 2003). Knowledge societies are understood in terms of learning societies by Hargreaves, whereby citizens are provided with extensive opportunities for lifelong up-skilling and retraining. Hargreaves argues that teaching for a knowledge society involves developing in teachers and students deep cognitive learning, creativity and ingenuity; the ability to work in networks and teams; a commitment to ongoing professional learning; problem-solving and risk-taking strategies; and the skills to work collaboratively and cope with change.

Change is endemic and rapid in our society today. We are living in a risk society (Beck 1992). Giddens (1991) offers a complex yet subtle account of the interaction between large impersonal forces that shape human destiny (globalisation, technological change, changes in values) and the social practices of individual actions. In the context of this risk society, both Beck and Giddens highlight the importance of institutionalised reflexivity. For Field (2006) this notion of reflexivity is the medium of human action and interaction and all of the associated problems that are involved with human action in our society today, namely uncertainty, insecurity, inequitable distribution of resources and access to a range of structures and services. Edwards, Stewart and Strain (2002) argue that in order to deal with the extensive changes that are taking place in our society, learning needs to become

reflexive and to be part of the ‘life politics of individuals, organisations and society’ (527). They differentiate this kind of learning from traditional models of learning based on the transmission and acquisition of knowledge. This kind of reflexivity is perceived as the ability to act in the world and to critically reflect on our actions and in ways that may reconstitute how we act and even reshape the very nature of identity itself. Reflexivity becomes defined as a ‘project of the self’ as an active and creative subject (Elliot 2001). Edwards, Stewart and Strain (2002) argue that reflexivity is a critical component of a theory of lifelong learning, which needs to be developed. They describe reflexivity as ‘the capacity to develop critical awareness of the assumptions that underlie practices, especially the meta-cognitive interpretative schemata that constitute worlds’ (533). Teacher education providers need to acknowledge the presence of the risk society and need to plan how they are going to interact with this society. The act of learning itself is a risk, therefore the need for reflexivity is absolute. While the knowledge economy cannot be avoided, lifelong learning can be embraced as a strategy to enable citizens to shape the knowledge economy.

Teacher education and lifelong learning

The European Commission’s (2007) communication *Improving the quality of teacher education* presents an analysis of the challenges facing teacher education today and identifies key policy concerns to be addressed at national and EU level. Lifelong learning for teachers is considered to be vital, involving quality programmes of initial teacher education, appropriate early-career support and relevant continuing professional development opportunities for teachers and school leaders – all of these programmes should be informed by systematic academic research and extensive practical experience. At the European level, Community programmes such as the Comenius and Erasmus actions within the Socrates programme and the Leonardo Da Vinci programme have provided support for projects to promote the development of teachers’ competences. The current Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013) will increase support for teacher mobility and for cooperation projects between teacher education institutions (European Commission 2007a).

Kellaghan (2009) identifies at least five factors that can be interpreted as indicating the presence of circumstances favourable for the reform of teacher education: an appreciation that learning is life-long; that we live in, and pupils have to be prepared for, a ‘knowledge economy’; that Information and Communication Technologies have a contribution to make in developing the kind of knowledge and skills that will be required in the future; that the range of research findings that can be drawn on to improve learning and teaching is increasing; and that, over the past decade, considerable additional resources have been provided for teacher education (15). These five factors are, I believe, essential interconnected parts of lifelong teacher education.

Potentially the fields of teacher education (which exists predominantly within the fields of formal education) and lifelong learning (which has been largely informed by non-formal education) have much to gain from cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches. There is a growing recognition of the need for teacher education policies to embrace the concept of lifelong learning and to acknowledge teachers’ needs at every stage in the teaching career (OECD 2005). However, certain tensions remain between formal and non-formal education theorists (Dolan 2011).

While formal education has traditionally been associated with a hierarchically structured, chronologically graded education system running from primary school through to university, non-formal education has been associated with learner centred, flexible, participatory, practical, bottom-up approaches to learning. Apart from the White Paper on Adult Education, the sectoral interpretation of lifelong learning in Ireland remains in the realm of non-formal education. However, the key principles of lifelong learning need to be adopted by both formal and non-formal education if learning for all, across the lifespan, is to be realistically achieved. An integrative approach to lifelong learning challenges all aspects of formal education (including pre-school-, primary-, secondary- and third-level education, including teacher education) to promote holistic learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning, while at the same time preparing students to become lifelong learners. The re-conceptualisation of teacher education, which is long overdue, provides a unique opportunity to marry elements of formal and non-formal education through the lifelong process of teacher education as advocated by the Teaching Council of Ireland.

Recent developments in teacher education in Ireland

Teacher education policy in Ireland is at a 'critical juncture' (Harford 2010, 357). Recognising the complexities of teaching, and the challenges facing teachers in today's knowledge-based, dynamic society, 'the provision of initial teacher education is an important component of teacher education which is considered nowadays not as an end in itself but rather as the launching-point for the continuing professional development of teachers' (Department of Education and Skills 2006, 1). Therefore, if the Teaching Council's (2011) continuum of teacher education is going to promote teachers as lifelong learners, then initial teacher education should start the process with immediate effect. In order to comprehend teacher education in Ireland, it is important to highlight some of its characteristics and some recent developments that have taken place. Significant factors include the traditional marginalisation of teacher education in Ireland, recent curriculum reforms and current plans for the reform of teacher education.

Historically, the field of teacher education, which is associated with the more intensive, less prestigious and less rewarded work of preparing teachers (Ducharme and Ducharme 1996), has been somewhat marginalised within the traditional high-status university sector (Furlong 1996). Some would argue that the historical legacy of teacher education's marginalisation in the higher education sector has been countered to some extent by the movement of teacher education into university departments or schools of education or by the accreditation of teacher education courses by the university sector. However, this move into the mainstream academy has not been without its tensions (Burke 2000). Many teacher educators are now struggling to balance the demands between delivering high quality, intensive teaching required for teacher education programmes with the academic demands of conducting research, so much so that teacher education remains what Maguire (1994) has called 'the impossible job' (122).

Significant changes and reform of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment have continued since the 1990s at pre-school-, primary- and post-primary levels. *Aistear* (the Irish word for journey) is the new curriculum framework for all children from birth to six years of age in Ireland (NCCA 2009). The word *Aistear* was chosen because early childhood marks the beginning of one's lifelong learning journey and

the programme actively supports the concept of lifelong learning. The emergence of new technologies and social media are also having an impact on how young people communicate and learn. Renewed emphasis has been placed on social inclusion and multiculturalism, the importance of partnership with parents has been highlighted, the early identification of children with learning difficulties has become a primary concern and there is increased access to facilities such as interactive white boards in Irish schools. There are escalating expectations about the role of teachers as increased interaction is now required, with a greater number of stakeholders including students, colleagues, parents and various specialists in education.

Initial primary teacher education is designed to prepare students as professional practitioners who will deliver the primary school curriculum in their future capacity as primary teachers in Irish classrooms. One of the aims of the primary school curriculum, which was revised in 1999, is 'to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning (DES/NCCA 1999, 7). The curriculum places a strong emphasis on lifelong learning skills such as developing the ability to question, to analyse, to investigate, to think critically, to solve problems, to interact effectively with others and to be able to learn through the use of ICT – the challenge remains for teacher education to do the same. While lifelong learning features as part of the ideology of the primary curriculum, the same cannot be said for the BEd degree programme.² The structure and content of the curriculum for student primary teachers has remained largely unchanged since the introduction of the BEd degree in 1974, with the exception of minor structural and content adjustments.

In 1999, a Working Group on Primary Pre-Service Teacher Education's report, entitled *Preparing teachers for the twenty-first century*, recommended 'a root and branch reform based on a re-conceptualisation of (initial) teacher education' (Department of Education and Skills 2002, 19). Interestingly this review of primary teacher education only mentioned the term 'lifelong learning' once in the whole document in a rather insignificant fashion (128). Specifically, the report proposed the extension of the BEd course from three to four years. The report also advocated a reduction in the time spent at formal lectures in favour of smaller group work and personal study. In particular, the report recommended that significant attention be paid to the requirements of the revised primary school curriculum (DES/NCCA 1999). Other issues raised included the lack of integration within the BEd (even though primary school teachers are expected to plan integrated teaching of the primary curriculum); an over-reliance on the 'transmission model' (i.e., through the lecture format, even though staff advocate other approaches to teaching and learning); over-crowded programmes, in which the demands on the students are excessive; and the lack of time for student reflection (Department of Education and Skills 2002). It is generally accepted that students would benefit greatly from more engagement with experiential learning (Coolahan 2002). These issues have also been raised in other studies (Hall, Marchant, and Ghali 1999; OECD 1991). While some action has been taken on a minority of the Working Group's recommendations, the majority are still awaiting implementation (Burke 2009).

There are a number of reasons why the reforms were not implemented at the time, namely the radical nature of the proposals, a lack of leadership, that the Teaching Council had yet to be established and the specific constraints pertinent to Irish colleges of education. It could be argued that the reforms were simply too radical for those responsible for teacher education at the time. Feiman-Nemser (2001), who is quite critical of traditional initial teacher education programmes, calls for

more powerful learning opportunities for teachers. She argues that initial teacher education as it is currently constructed, that is, 'a collection of unrelated courses and field experiences' (1049) is incapable of providing serious and sustained professional learning for student teachers. The radical nature of reforms needed by teacher education have also been highlighted by Fullan et al. (1998) who state 'we are dealing with a reform proposal so profound that the teaching profession itself, along with the culture of schools and schools of education, will have to undergo total transformation in order for substantial progress to be made' (68). Other reasons for the lack of implementation of the reforms include a lack of leadership from those responsible for teacher education policy. This was apparent in the complete absence of discussion that took place after the report was published.

The Teaching Council was not established at the time and the much needed discussions about teacher education were paused until its establishment in 2006. In 2002, teacher education was not a political priority and Burke (2009) argues that the colleges were constrained by the piecemeal nature of the BEd programme and the external examiner system, by the overloaded nature of programmes and by the brevity and artificiality of the teaching practice experience.

While the idea of a continuum of teacher education suggests a commitment to lifelong teacher development (Teaching Council 2011) and the Teaching Council appears committed to the concept of the teacher as lifelong learner (Teaching Council 2007), it remains to be seen how this commitment will be maintained and delivered in practice. For example, will each teacher education provider be required to demonstrate their policies and practices in relation to lifelong learning? Will lifelong learning become one of the criteria for obtaining teacher accreditation in the future? To avoid lifelong learning becoming a meaningless mantra, it is important for the Teaching Council to indicate its philosophical underpinnings behind the notion of teacher as lifelong learner and to indicate how the concept can become a reality.

Introducing the principles and practices of lifelong learning into initial teacher education

In theory, lifelong learning has significant implications for teacher education. In practice, the academic disciplines of teacher education and lifelong learning have remained as separate and desperate entities in the education literature. Educational theorists such as Day (1999) and Longworth and Davies (1996), who share a philosophical commitment to lifelong learning, highlight the importance of lifelong learning for those involved in primary education, due to the tremendous potential of teachers to positively nurture or negatively demolish a love of learning. In order to integrate some of the ideas and principles from lifelong learning into the BEd degree programme the following recommendations are suggested for all agencies involved in teacher education.

Introduce lifelong learning as a compulsory component of the teacher education curriculum

Coolahan (2002) argues that there is no evidence that teachers are aware of the implications of a lifelong learning policy for their work. According to Skilbeck (2004), 'we have a long road to travel before lifelong learning becomes as familiar in practical terms as schooling is today' (37). Learning how to learn and learning

across the lifespan must be more than mere slogans, they should be written into all teacher education programmes and their principles should inform curricula, content, context and pedagogical approaches of all teaching and learning opportunities. The BEd degree programme should include discrete modules on lifelong learning as part of the core curriculum and the BEd itself should be designed and delivered with the explicit aim of preparing student teachers as lifelong learners. A commitment to continuing professional development throughout one's career should be clearly signalled at the initial phase of teacher education. It is important for student teachers to recognise that initial teacher education is only the first step on the continuum of teacher education.

Devise a curriculum for teacher educators

The need to introduce student teachers to lifelong learning raises a number of issues about the professional experiences and induction of teacher educators themselves, a theme that does not feature strongly in empirical research (Murray 2005). Teacher educators should be well versed with the theory and philosophy of lifelong learning (Dolan 2008). However, many teacher educators learn 'on the job' with very little induction or support. Also, several teacher educators have been teachers themselves who were once involved in school life and Murray (2005) found that the transition between school teaching and working in teacher education was a stressful career change for teacher educators, largely due to inadequate induction. Many teacher educators also continue to use didactic approaches to teaching, which are contrary to the ideas of student-directed learning, constructivist education and lifelong learning (Lunenberg and Korthagen 2005). As teacher education is such a complex process, Cochran-Smith (2003) argues for the need for a curriculum for educating teacher educators and for a discussion about what teacher educators need to know in order to prepare teachers for the twenty-first century.

Just as there should be a continuum of teacher development for teachers, the same should apply to teacher educators. The education of teacher educators is a process that needs to be conceptualised as one that continues across the professional lifespan of the teacher educator (Cochran-Smith 2005). This group of professionals need to perceive themselves as lifelong learners, need to be lifelong learners in practice and need to model positive models of lifelong learning in every aspect of a teacher education programme. Induction courses (Murray 2005) should be available for new teacher educators as well as professional development courses for all other teacher educators that include modules on lifelong learning.

Incorporate teachers as active partners

Teacher education is intensely complex and does not lend itself to simplistic approaches. According to Burke (2009) neither schools/teachers or colleges/universities can adequately educate teachers on their own because neither has access to the full range of skills, knowledge, expertise and up-to-date experience and wisdom that is required. Teachers' participation within teacher education programmes varies widely across countries and within countries (Conway et al. 2007). It is important for colleges of education to establish sustainable partnerships with schools and practicing teachers in order to offer a BEd that is realistic and cognisant of the realities of life in schools. Such a partnership could be mutually beneficial for schools and

colleges of education. A key strategy involves finding ways for teachers and student teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically. In order to promote lifelong teacher education, it is important to re-think the role of teachers, for example through mentoring; through delivery of core modules; through provision of access to some real life teaching for student teachers through video recording and web links; and through the development of real partnerships with teacher educators. More importantly, policy on lifelong learning needs to locate the teacher strategically within reform of teacher education (Coolahan 2002) and the teacher needs to move from the periphery to the centre of teacher education in partnership with teacher educators.

In order to foster the culture of lifelong learning, it is important for all key stakeholders participating in the teacher education programme, namely lecturers, school teachers and schools principals, to form an alliance and partnership in the interests of learning from each other. Moreover, the role of student teachers as prospective lifelong learners may be enhanced and supported by a partnership of this kind (Albasheer et al. 2008).

Promote the co-construction of knowledge

The profile of students entering initial teacher education is changing. Colleges of education in Ireland are increasingly faced with students who are choosing teaching after engaging in a range of life experiences. These students bring rich knowledge bases that provide a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. The acknowledgement of this rich knowledge base in pre-service undergraduate teacher education is rather limited (Dolan 2008). This implies a philosophical question of power: who decides on the knowledge that will be part of the teacher education programme and why one form of knowledge is more important than another. There is a growing interest in ways to build cumulative knowledge, for example by strengthening connections between research and practice and between schools and teacher educators and by encouraging schools and colleges of education to develop as learning organisations. In the interest of creating a dynamic teacher education programme, knowledge creation needs to be seen as a process of co-construction between a range of partners in teacher education, particularly in the context of reflective practice.

Reflective practice

The need to reflect on self as a means of self-development is widely endorsed in schools of education globally. Reflective practice is an important aspect of teacher education in both theoretical and practical respects (Pollard et al. 2008; Schon 1987). Opportunities for reflective practice, and the nature of those opportunities, vary according to individual teacher education programmes. Nevertheless, its important contribution to the formation of a teacher remains undisputed. Recent studies and reviews (Conway et al. 2007; Department of Education and Skills 2002; OECD 2005) have called for a stronger emphasis on reflective practice allied to the development of critical inquiry skills. These skills are fundamental to lifelong learning in general and to the teacher as a lifelong learner in particular. While reflective practice is well documented in the literature of teacher education, the concept of reflectivity features in the literature of lifelong learning (Edwards, Stewart, and

Strain 2002). Although the two concepts are sometimes used interchangeably, there are distinct differences between them. Reflection takes place as a response to a specific event, whereas reflexivity takes place on a deeper level and incorporates reflections about the self, the event and the wider social context in which the event took place. Gabel (2001) argues that reflective practice and reflexivity between experience and practice are common research themes in an era of teacher education. To be reflexive can actually nourish reflections as introspection leads to heightened awareness, personal development and improvement of self and of the practice of teacher education. Teacher education that embraces principles of lifelong learning could proactively incorporate opportunities for reflexivity for students and teacher educators.

Establish a broader role for teacher education

In the context of lifelong learning, greater emphasis is now being placed on the provision of education programmes throughout the life cycle for early childhood education, youth education, further education and adult education. Consequently, the possibility of staff interchanges between a number of education sectors should be encouraged in order to promote cross-sectoral learning and cross collaboration of ideas. As Coolahan (2002) states, 'lifelong learning requires linkages and bridge-building so that citizens may benefit from smooth transitions in-and-out of the education and training systems, at all stages of their life span' (30). The Teaching Council of Ireland is now responsible for accrediting teacher education programmes in the formal sector and education programmes for tutors and teachers in the further education sector. Hence, there is now genuine potential for cross-fertilisation of ideas between teacher educators in the formal and further education sectors, potential which could be supported by the Teaching Council and by teacher education providers.

Foster collaboration between partners

Lifelong learning policies raise a number of fundamental questions in relation to the providers of teacher education. Are colleges of education simply required to transmit knowledge and to mould teachers in an unquestioning fashion or are they expected to work with students in creating new lifelong learning models of teacher education? It is important for colleges of education to clearly articulate their vision of teacher education (Deegan 2008). Closer links between the philosophy and practice of teacher education and lifelong learning could potentially bridge a number of gaps that currently exist: between in-service and pre-service teacher education; between colleges of education and schools; and between teacher educators and teachers. Such cross-collaboration of ideas would also assist in the creation of 'communities of teacher learners' (Deegan 2008), networks of teachers, teacher educators and student teachers with a shared interest of promoting lifelong teacher education. This is also supported by Nicholls (2000), who argues that lifelong learning strategies can help promote the creation of a learning community based on the interactions between educational institutions and their host communities, that is, involving teachers, students, teacher educators, schools and higher education institutions. The challenge here, however, is to broaden the frameworks of teaching and learning within higher education to incorporate a commitment to lifelong learning. Redesign-

ing teacher education programmes that are informed by the philosophy of lifelong learning would also go some way to converting the rhetoric of lifelong learning into reality, thus addressing some of the criticisms that have been raised in the literature (Chapman and Aspin 1997; Frost and Taylor 2001; Henkel 2001).

Conclusion

Initial teacher education is on the cusp of radical change in Ireland. This article argues that a reform of the BEd degree programme ought to be informed by the philosophies and practices of lifelong learning. This could be achieved by introducing students to the theories of lifelong learning, by teacher educators modelling best practice in lifelong learning and by student teachers acknowledging that initial teacher education is just the first step in the continuum of professional teacher education. Traditionally, lifelong learning has been interpreted in terms of further or continuous education after the initial phase of compulsory education. Analysts such as Hargreaves (2002), however, consider the extent and quality of education during the earlier 'formative' years to be of critical importance for the ability and motivation of learners to engage in lifelong learning throughout their lives. This has direct implications for teacher education programmes, for teacher educators and for every teacher.

Ironically, the primary school curriculum for young children in Ireland espouses the principles of lifelong learning. Surely this alone should be a reason for incorporating lifelong learning approaches into initial teacher education for primary teachers. Moreover, it can also be argued that teachers are unaware of the implications of a lifelong learning policy for their identity as teachers and for their work in the classroom and in their local communities (Coolahan 2002). This is no longer acceptable, as teachers need to take their lead from the best of this knowledge society's corporate sector and strive to form learning systems, learning organizations and professional learning communities, as 'no one teacher knows enough to cope or improve by himself or herself' (Hargreaves 2003, 25).

Lifelong learning theoretical frameworks have been largely shaped by European and UN philosophers. Ettore Gelphi (1979) was responsible for lifelong education at UNESCO from 1972 to 1993. He believed that lifelong education could potentially liberate and encourage democratic participation or inhibit and stifle human development, depending on the political will of those developing and implanting lifelong education policies. The same is true today for teacher educators. At this challenging time for education in Ireland, this article sets out a rationale for developing programmes in initial teacher education which are informed by the policies and practices of lifelong learning.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful and helpful comments made on earlier drafts of this paper.

Notes

1. The Teaching Council (An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta) was established in Ireland in March 2006 (under the Teaching Council Act 2001) to promote teaching as a profession

at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers and to regulate standards in the profession.

2. The BEd degree for primary teachers is a three-year, full-time degree programme with the exception of the colleges affiliated to Trinity College, who offer a fourth year for an honours degree. In general, the BEd programme allocates 40% to education, 40% to an academic subject and 20% to teaching practice. Methodologies in curricular areas of the revised primary curriculum form a significant part of the education component. The foundation disciplines, for example philosophy, psychology and sociology, are also included. From September 2012 the BEd degree will be offered as a four-year programme.

Notes on contributor

Anne M. Dolan is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland. She teaches methodology courses in primary geography and a range of modules in adult and community education, lifelong learning and development and intercultural education. Her doctoral research focused on the experience of mature student teachers undertaking their studies in the context of lifelong learning. Current research interests include lifelong learning, development education, primary geography and participatory approaches to education.

References

- Albasheer, A., S. Khasawneh, A.A. Nabah, and S. Hailat. 2008. Perceptions of student teachers towards the effectiveness of co-operating teachers, school principals and university supervisors participating in the teacher education program in Jordan. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 27, no. 6: 693–705.
- Aspin, D.N. 2001. *International handbook of lifelong learning*. Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic.
- Beck, U. 1992. *The risk society*. London: Sage.
- Brine, J. 2006. Lifelong learning and the knowledge economy: Those that know and those that do not: The discourse of the European Union. *British Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 5: 649–65.
- Burke, A. 2000. The devil's bargain: The B.Ed. degree under review. *Oideas*, 48: single author issue.
- Burke, A. 2009. The B.Ed. degree: Still under review. *Oideas: Journal of the Department of Education and Science* 54: 30–67.
- Chapman, Judith D., and Aspin David. 1997. *The school, the community and lifelong learning*. School Development Series. London: Cassell.
- Cochran-Smith, M. 2003. Learning and unlearning: The education of teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 19, no. 1: 5–28.
- Cochran-Smith, M. 2005. Studying teacher education: What we know and need to know. *Journal of Teacher Education* 56, no. 4: 301–6.
- Conway, P., R. Murphy, A. Rath, and K. Hall. 2007. Learning to teach and its implications for the continuum of teacher education: A nine country cross country study. Teaching Council. http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Teacher%20Education/LearningToTeach-ConwayMurphyRathHall-2009_10344263.pdf.
- Coolahan, J. 1981. *Irish education: History and structure*. Dublin: IPA.
- Coolahan, J. 2002. Teacher education and the teaching career in an era of lifelong learning. OECD Education Working Paper No. 2. OECD. [http://olis.oecd.org/OLIS/2002DOC.NSF/LINKTO/EDU_WKP\(2002\)2](http://olis.oecd.org/OLIS/2002DOC.NSF/LINKTO/EDU_WKP(2002)2).
- Coolahan, J. 2007. A review paper on thinking and policies related to teacher education in Ireland. Teaching Council. http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Teacher%20Education/Continuum_ppr_PositionPaperJohnCoolahan_18feb2009_ck_61560932.pdf.
- Council of the European Union. 2008. *Draft 2008 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme 'Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation'*. Brussels: Author.
- Day, Christopher. 1999. *Developing teachers: The challenges of lifelong learning*. London: Falmer.

- Deegan, J. 2008. Working together for change: Bridging a vision for teacher education across colleges and schools. In *Touch* 92: 41–2.
- Department of Education and Skills. 2002. *Preparing teachers for the twenty-first century: Report of the working group on primary pre-service teacher education*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education and Skills. 2006. Learning to teach: Students on teaching practice in Irish primary schools. Dublin: Department of Education and Science. http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/insp_learning_to_teach.pdf.
- Department of Education and Skills. 2011a. *National strategy for higher education to 2030*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education and Skills. 2011b. *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011–2020*. Dublin: Author.
- Department of Education and Science. 1998. *Adult education in an era of lifelong learning: Green Paper on adult education*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education and Science. 2000. *Learning for life: White Paper on adult education*. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. 1999. *Curaclam na bunscoile* [Primary school curriculum]. Dublin: Government Publications.
- Dolan, A.M. 2008. *The experience of mature students undertaking the B.Ed. in Ireland*. Unpublished Doctorate in Education Thesis, Sheffield Hallam University.
- Dolan, A.M. 2012. Lifelong learning: a new paradigm for teacher education. In *Emerging educational trends in contemporary Ireland: Trends and challenges*, ed. T. Grenham and P. Kiernan, 53–72. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Drudy, S. 2010. Education and the knowledge economy: A challenge for Ireland in changing times. In *Education in Ireland: Challenge and change*, ed. S. Drudy, 35–56. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- Ducharme, E., and M. Ducharme. 1996. A study of teacher educators: Research from the United States of America. *Journal of Education for Teaching* 22, no. 1: 57–70.
- Edwards, R., R. Stewart, and M. Strain. 2002. Reflexivity: Towards a theory of lifelong learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 21, no. 6: 525–36.
- Elliot, A.M. 2001. *Concepts of the self*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- European Commission. 2000a. The Lisbon agenda. European Commission. <http://clubofrome.at/events/2006/brussels/lisbon-strategy-2000.html>.
- European Commission. 2000b. Presidency conclusions. European Commission. http://europa.eu.int/council/off/conc.mar00_en.pdf.
- European Commission. 2007. Improving the quality of teacher education. European Commission. http://ec.europa.eu/education/com392_en.pdf.
- European Commission. 2007a. The lifelong learning programme: education and training opportunities for all. EC http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm.
- European Commission. 2010. Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. European Commission. http://ec.eu2020/index_en.htm.
- Feiman-Nemser, S. 2001. From preparation to practice. Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record* 103, no. 6: 1013–55.
- Field, J. 2006. *Lifelong learning and the new educational order*. 2nd ed. Stoke on Trent, Sterling, UK, VA: Trentham Books.
- Frost, N., and R. Taylor. 2001. Patterns of change in the university: The impact of ‘lifelong learning’ and the ‘world of work’. *Studies in the Education of Adults* 33, no. 1: 49.
- Fullan, M., G. Galluzzo, P. Morris, and N. Watson. 1998. *The rise and stall of teacher education reform*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education.
- Furlong, J. 1996. Do student teachers need higher education? In *The role of higher education in initial teacher education*, ed. J. Furlong and R. Smith, 185–98. London: Kogan Page.
- Gabel, S. 2001. ‘I wash my face with dirty water’: Narratives of disability and pedagogy. *Journal of Teacher Education* 52: 31–46.

- Gelphi, E. 1979. *A future for lifelong education. Volume 1: Lifelong education: Principles, policies and practices*. Manchester: Manchester University, Department of Adult and Higher Education.
- Gewirtz, S. 2008. Give us a break! A sceptical review of contemporary discourses of lifelong learning. *European Educational Research Journal* 7, no. 4: 414–24.
- Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and self-identity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Government of Ireland. 2007. *Ireland: National development plan, 2007–2013. Transforming Ireland: A better quality of life for all*. Dublin: The Stationery Office. <http://www.ndp.ie/documents/ndp2007-2013/NDP-2007-2013-English.pdf>.
- Hall, K., P. Marchant, and N. Ghali. 1999. A quantitative comparison of teacher education: Students' experiences at two colleges in England and the Republic of Ireland. *European Journal of Teacher Education* 22, no. 2: 209–21.
- Harford, J. 2010. Teacher education policy in Ireland and the challenges of the twenty-first century. *European Journal of Teacher Education* 33, no. 4: 349–60.
- Hargreaves, D.H. 2002. Effective schooling for lifelong learning. In *International perspectives for lifelong learning: From recurrent education to the knowledge society*, ed. D. Istance, H.G. Schuetze, and T. Schuller, 49–62. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Hargreaves, A. 2003. *Teaching in the knowledge society: Education in an age of insecurity*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Henkel, Mary. 2001. The UK: The home of the lifelong learning university? *European Journal of Education* 36, no. 3: 277.
- Kellaghan, T. 2009. The future of the teacher education continuum in Ireland: Opportunities and challenges. *Oideas – Journal of the Department of Education and Science* 54: 14–29.
- Leathwood, C., and B. Francis. 2006. *Gender and lifelong learning: Critical feminist engagements*. London, New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Longworth, N., and W.K. Davies. 1996. *Lifelong learning: New vision, new implications, new roles for people, organizations, nations and communities in the twenty-first century*. London: Kogan Page.
- Lunenberg, M., and F.A. Korthagen. 2005. Breaking the didactic circle: A study on some aspects of the promotion of student-directed learning by teachers and teacher educators. *European Journal of Teacher Education* 28, no. 1: 1–22.
- Maguire, M. 1995. Dilemmas in teaching teachers: the tutor's perspective. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 1, no. 1: 119–31.
- Murphy, M. 2000. Adult education, lifelong learning and the end of the political economy. *Studies in the Education of Adults* 2: 166–80.
- Murray, J. 2005. Re-addressing the priorities: New teacher educators and induction into higher education. *European Journal of Teacher Education* 28, no. 1: 67–85.
- NCCA. 2009. *The early childhood curriculum framework*. Dublin: Author. NCCA. http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/PrinciplesThemes_ENG/PrinciplesThemes_ENG.pdf.
- Nicholls, Gill. 2000. Professional development, teaching and lifelong learning: The implications for higher education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 19, no. 4: 370–7.
- OECD. 1991. *Review of national education policy: Ireland*. Paris: Author.
- OECD. 2005. *Teachers matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers*. Paris: Author.
- Pollard, A., with J. Anderson, M. Maddock, S. Swaffield, J. Warin, and P. Warwick. 2008. *Reflective teaching*. 3rd ed. London: Continuum.
- Skilbeck, M. 2004. Towards a curriculum for lifelong learning. In *Curriculum and ideology: Irish experiences, international perspectives*, ed. C. Sugrue, 35–63. Dublin: Liffey Press.
- Schuetze, H.G. 2006. International concepts and agendas of lifelong learning. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 36, no. 3: 289–306.
- Schuetze, H.G., and C. Casey. 2006. Models and meanings of lifelong learning: Progress and barriers on the road to a learning society. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 36, no. 3: 289–306.

- Schön, D. 1987. *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Strain, M., and J. Field. 1997. On the myth of the learning society. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 45, no. 2: 141–55.
- Teaching Council. 2007. *Codes of professional conduct for teachers*. Maynooth: Teaching Council. http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Professional%20Standards/final-codes_ENG%20BW%2034227443_brf_BandW_13jul2007_ck.pdf.
- Teaching Council. 2011. *Policy on the continuum of teacher education*. Maynooth, Ireland: Teaching Council. http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Teacher%20Education/FINAL%20TC_Policy_Paper_SP.pdf.
- Webster, F. 2002. *Theories of the information society*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- World Bank. 2009. Education for the knowledge economy. World Bank. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/0,,contentMDK:20161496~menuPK:540092~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:282386,00.html>.