

MATURITY ON THE HORIZON: IS THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES READY FOR A TEACHER EDUCATOR FRAMEWORK?

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Research on teacher educators is fragmented but different trends are emerging from a variety of contexts that recognize it as a distinct profession. This research aims to highlight the features of a potential UAE teacher educator framework that has emerged from my research on authentic professional learning, and where professional learning might be focused in the future to build on teacher educators' professional knowledge in the UAE. This paper explores the potential characteristics of a UAE Teacher Educator Framework through the methodological lens of narrative inquiry.

Approach/Methodology/Design: Teacher educators have formal associations in the USA, Belgium, The Netherlands, Israel, and Australia and these associations have professionalized the industry and created standards and frameworks to support professional learning. No such associations or standards exist in the United Arab Emirates. Drawing on the work of Keltchermans (2018), Kreijns (2019) and the existing frameworks from other contexts, this paper illustrates the potential blueprint for the UAE education sector.

Findings: The findings suggest that inter-cultural learning and sensory awareness of the contextual factors that underpin the sector may allow teacher educators to feel empowered to support teachers and their peers in a complex cultural and economic environment.

Practical Implications: The practical implications propose a new way of working and thinking within the UAE context, and the framework can be applied and adapted to both the public and private sectors.

Originality/value: Teacher educators have formal associations in the USA, Belgium, The Netherlands, Israel, and Australia and these associations have professionalized the industry and created standards and frameworks to support professional learning. No such associations or standards exist in the United Arab Emirates so this work offers significant value in an under-researched space.

INTRODUCTION

The importance and the status of the global teaching profession has been written about extensively (Darling-Hammond, 2010), yet the status of those that train and support teachers has not yet received the same attention. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the professional learning of teacher educators was poorly understood, and their learning within the context of their roles was undervalued. This situation has changed in the last ten to fifteen years (Ping et al, 2017), as the importance of teacher educators has been gradually recognised

(Van der Klink et al., 2017, p.163) and the profession has become distinct *within* the education sector. Within the United Arab Emirates, the education sector has been described as “consumerist” and lacking in knowledge creation due to its complex cultural and economic environment (Ryan & Daly, 2017). This situation is the result of international systems, traditional career paths and national systems becoming blurred due to urbanisation (Sarmadi, 2013; Erogul, 2014) and political changes to the education sector, including public-private partnerships, and the marketization of education (Winchip, 2019).

The current structure of short-term work visas, a lack of job security and the associated employment restrictions is a barrier to attracting education professionals to the UAE, as the vast majority of teacher educators in the UAE are mobile foreign workers (Ryan & Daly, 2017). In light of this, the status of teacher educators within the UAE could be viewed as fragile, and therefore, their interactions with others might be affected by this. They may also possess professional knowledge about solutions to problems that have not yet come to the forefront of the sector. Working in the UAE education sector as a teacher educator for several years has enabled me to develop my awareness of this complex and nuanced context.

Within the UAE, there are teacher networks and associations, functioning within their own segment of the sector. For example, the UAE Research Schools Network exists between four British curriculum schools, and it encourages evidence-based research. The Gulf Comparative Education Society serves to support teacher educators within the higher education sector, mainly associated with universities and institutions. Both are niche associations, and networks, serving specific purposes.

Although there is a set of UAE teacher professional standards, no such standards exist for teacher educators. Within other contexts, professional standards and/or learning models exist to inform the profession and to align professional practice, which has consequently professionalised the industry and raised its status (Ping et al, 2017). For example, the Association of Teacher Educators in the USA, The Dutch Association for Teacher Educators (VELON) in the Netherlands, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in Australia, MOFET (Hebrew) in Israel, and the Association for Teacher Educators in Europe (ATEE).

Within Western and Anglophone settings, teacher educators are required to demonstrate their expertise not only in their subject (teaching) but also within areas of policy and research. Commonly accepted criteria for defining a profession in Western/other Anglophone contexts include: 1) the profession performs a crucial social function, 2) it requires a considerable degree of skill, 3) its professionals draw on a substantial body of knowledge, 4) its entry requires a lengthy period in higher education, and 5) its professionals require a high degree of autonomy (Verloop et al., 2001). These criteria are not defined in the UAE, and therefore, an opportunity exists to explore the space related to teacher educator professional learning in the UAE. Perhaps this gap in research provides an opportunity to highlight the structural conditions of professional learning within the UAE for teacher educators, such as the employment and residency laws, and the nature of the UAE as an emerging research context.

These factors have underpinned this research, and therefore, present a set of challenges that are unique for teacher educators in the region.

In reviewing and reflecting on the literature, I have often questioned whether distinct professional skills are needed to survive and prosper in the UAE education sector and whether the UAE should adopt a set of teacher educator standards or a framework like other countries in order to professionalise the industry (Ben-Peretz et al., 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of the teacher educator

As political and economic structures within countries have changed, teacher educators have also worked with public and private operators “who actively facilitate the (formal) learning of student teachers and teachers” (European Commission, 2013). These operators include teaching-practice supervisors, school mentors and also those in charge of professional learning programmes (Dengerink et al, 2015; Ping et al., 2017). Over the last ten years, teacher educators have been characterised as “teachers of teachers”, (Dengerink et al, 2015, p78) and are engaged in a wide variety of practices (Kelchtermans et al, 2018). They fulfil many context-dependent roles that can change over time (Guberman & Mcdossi, 2019, p.1). As a group of heterogeneous professionals, their identities are often “fluid, constructed over time as they may adopt multiple roles such as teacher educator, researcher, coach, school improvement partner, gatekeeper, and curriculum developer” (Meeus et al, 2017, p.16). Not all teacher educators experience all these roles, and for those that do, there may be competing demands (Ping et al, 2017). The implications of teacher educators in the UAE having different titles and roles means that the cultural interpretations attached to them will vary in different communities, including those of native and non-native speakers of English. Similarly, if a teacher educator adopts multiple roles, and therefore, titles, there may be some form of internal bias towards a particular title or role that establishes their public identity (Meeus et al., 2017).

This complexity suggests that teacher educators need to be recognised as a “specific and autonomous profession” because their expertise is therefore at a ‘dual level’ (Kelchtermans et al, 2018, p.122). In Sweden, for example, a country that has also adopted market-based practices of education, teacher educators have been labelled as ‘the hidden profession’ (Snoek, Swennen & Van Der Klink, 2011). The same could be true within the UAE, as teacher educators may operate in silos or within micro-contexts without any wider engagement with professional peers or any alignment to teacher educator standards. The study in Sweden includes the recommendation to safeguard the profession of teacher educators by developing a set of standards to give them professional status.

Most teachers have neither a formal route to becoming teacher educators nor a supportive induction program to learn from (Ping et al, 2017; Meeus et al, 2017). In some countries, the chance for experienced teachers to move on to another stage of their career and become a teacher educator is described as “serendipitous” (Kelchtermans et al., 2018, p.122). In general, two main factors often lead teacher educators towards their role: they were good

teachers and promoted into leadership roles; and/or they possess specific expertise in a specialist area such as a subject or skill (Ben-Peretz et al, 2010, p.113). As the majority of population of the UAE are foreign workers, their route to becoming an education professional in the UAE, as a teacher educator may not fit into any pre-defined box

Research and the teacher educator

The transition from teacher to teacher educator continues to be a challenge, as teacher educators are reported to take up to three years to establish their new identity. Within that time, they are required to develop their pedagogy as a teacher educator and grapple with a research identity to be accepted into higher education (Maaranen et al, 2019, p.212).

Teacher educators seeking to develop their research identity may find that their contribution to the research landscape of professional learning is undervalued, especially as they do not always work within academic research settings and are “uneasy residents in academe” (Murray, 2010, p198). As ‘semi-academics’ (Vanassche, 2019, p.1) they may struggle to gain recognition as legitimate consumers and producers of research (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2019, p16).

Additionally, teacher educators in school settings often find the lack of research culture within their workplaces problematic; a situation that underlines their personal responsibility to conduct their own research in order to develop the necessary research skills (Willemse & Boei, 2013, p.355). The successful development of a research identity may be the bridge to academia, but crossing this bridge may be particularly challenging in a society without a strong research culture, or where research is still an emerging dimension of that society.

Within emerging research settings in developing countries, the concept of disposition can play an important part in explaining teacher educator behaviours and sensitivity to research opportunities, and their ability to respond to these (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014). Three studies have framed this problem and explored the process of “inquiry of the mind” in teacher educators (Kreijns et al., 2019) alongside their ‘researcherly dispositions’ in complex environments with work-related pressures (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014, 2019). Little is known about the psychological mechanisms of teacher educators, however; or how workplace factors contribute or impede to developing a teacher educator’s ability to conduct research (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2019, p.1).

In psychology, a disposition is defined as a habit of mind or tendency towards a particular pattern of behaviour (Katz & Rath, 1985). The concept raises important questions such as: can dispositions be developed through experience? Are they immutable aspects of someone’s character? What is the relationship between an observed behaviour and a disposition? (Nelson, 2015, p87). For teacher educators, a researcherly disposition is “broadly defined as a teacher educators’ habit of mind to engage with research—both as consumer and producer—to improve their own practice and contribute to the knowledge base on teacher educators (Tack, 2017, p.181). A teacher educator’s researcherly disposition has three inter-related dimensions: 1) *the affective dimension*, which refers to the extent a teacher educator values a

research-oriented approach towards their daily practice, as well as their capacity to be a smart consumer or reader of research; 2) *the cognitive dimension*, which relates to how well a teacher educator is able to engage in research in his/her daily practice; and 3) *the behavioural dimension*, which refers to a teacher educator's ability to carry out research activities (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2019, p464). The dimensions are inter-related, since it can be assumed that the third dimension cannot be achieved unless the previous two have been.

The dimensions are helpful to explain different aspects of the teacher educator's research orientation. Teacher educators need to become more aware of the demands of their professional role and of how their "capabilities for conducting research are evolving" (Willemse & Boei, 2013, p357). Tack and Vanderlinde (2014) present a typology, the 'Teacher Educator Researcherly Disposition Scale' (TERDS), which consists of a 20-item questionnaire that can be used by teacher educators' to self-report researcherly dispositions. Within the question, they used first-person statements to explore each participant's self-assessment of their research capability, such as 'I conduct research to improve my own practice' and 'I have enough methodological knowledge to autonomously go through a research cycle (e.g., ask a research question, gather data, analyse and report data, etc.)'. The analytical framework within the study explores teacher educators' inclination to research, their sensitivity and alertness to opportunities, and their ability to follow through and conduct the research. This analysis enabled me to gain deeper insights into the factors that influence a teacher educator to behave in a certain way and the scale of behaviours can be used as a tool for reflection (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014, p.301).

The traits necessary in developing a teacher educator's research identity include having a strong personal interest, a positive attitude, and a sense of urgency, and these traits need to be informed by values and missions; while similarly, "our habits are context responsive" (Nelson, 2015, p.88). Tack and Vanderlinde (2014) offer a typology of three different types of teacher educators: *The Enquiring Teacher Educator*, who is defined as lacking professional knowledge and methodological expertise, and therefore lacking in cognitive and behavioural dimensions; *The Well-Read Teacher Educator*, which refers to a teacher educator who engages in reading academic literature from time to time, and who strongly values research as part of their occupation, but still lacks the behavioural dimension; and *The Teacher Educator-Researcher*, who demonstrates all three dimensions of researcherly dispositions (cognitive, behavioural and affective). A limitation of the Tack and Vanderlinde's study relevant to this research is that the research was conducted in a developed country, so the results may not be generalizable to the UAE. Nonetheless, I adopted the three dimensions of researcherly dispositions as an analytic tool within the context of my professional roles because the dispositions provide an appropriate psychological tool to frame this research.

Tack and Vanderlinde (2019) incorporate the research on dispositions with work-related pressures, professional growth, and job satisfaction to explain self-determination theory, which suggests that individuals have three basic psychological needs within the workplace: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Teacher educators are more likely to feel fulfilled in their roles when they have a sense of choice and psychological freedom, and when they feel

connected to and valued by others, and when they experience the need to self-report their competence. Further, the ‘relatedness’ dimension was the most important predictor of teacher educators researching their role.

Kreijns et al. (2019) explored the development of a psychometric instrument to measure teachers’ researcherly dispositions and improve understandings of teacher educators’ sensitivity to research opportunities, along with their capacity to conduct research. In their study, these researchers created a scale with three dimensions to measure a teacher’s ability to: 1) *value deep understanding*, 2) *reserve judgment and tolerate ambiguity* and, 3) *take a range of perspectives and pose focussed questions*. As a set of inquiry habits, they are general, and can therefore provide a scale of behaviours to reflect upon to judge one’s tendency to conduct research. However, they do not include any inter-cultural elements that may be relevant to the UAE. The scale items are as follows:

Value deep understanding

1. I am critical on whether I did the right thing.
2. I wonder if I can improve my work.
3. I watch how colleagues do things in order to learn from them.
4. I ask others what they think of my work.
5. I try to collect information so I can evaluate my work.

Reserve judgment and tolerate ambiguity

1. I refuse to accept unwarranted assertions and explanations irrespective of how plausible they might be.
2. I have a certain tolerance for uncertainties and ambiguities in offered solutions and explanations,
3. I am willing to accept some uncertainty provided that finally there is insight into proven solutions and reasonable explanations.
4. I can deal with situations wherein solutions and explanations are not yet available.

Take a range of perspectives and systematically pose increasingly focused questions

1. I try, when it comes to sorting things out, to pose increasingly better and more targeted questions.
2. I try to view things from other perspectives.
3. I try to avoid prejudices with regard to solutions and explanations.
4. I try, by means of a systematic approach to investigations, to find evidence for solutions and explanations.

Figure 1 Dimensions of inquiry habits

Source: Kreijns et al’s scale (2019)

Although Tack and Vanderlinde’s (2014) Teacher Educator Researcherly Disposition Scale (TERDS) and Kreijns et al’s (2019) Dimensions of Inquiry Habits (Figure 1) are similar, Kreijns et al’s (2019) scale appears to explore more psychological and cognitive traits as opposed to the more behavioural traits in Tack and Vanderlinde’s scale. Professional learning that facilitates the development of inquiry habits needs to “focus on attitudes, communication, and reflection”; and teacher educators need to continue working on their

competencies as life-long learners “who keep in touch with the latest developments and insights in their own field” (Kelchtermans et al, 2018, p128). The majority of factors within Kreijns et al’s scale have influenced my ability to develop a critical perspective in research, to reflect on my competencies as a lifelong learner, teacher educator, and researcher.

Teacher educators may benefit from engaging with international research, and hence to reflect on how they can translate this cultural knowledge into their practice. I have benefited from reflecting on my identity, values and behaviours as this has helped to determine my conceptualisation of this cultural knowledge into a context where I have maintained, as a complex professional role. Consequently, teacher educators’ reasons for engaging in research are a combination of internal and external motivations that can coexist (Guberman & Mcdossi, 2019). The motivations may include a personal interest in the research, a desire to contribute more fully to practice, and/or obtain academic recognition and a more influential position within their organisation (Guberman & Mcdossi, 2019). However, not all teacher educators in Maaranen et al’s (2019) study in Finland were interested either in research or in the theory underpinning their practice. In both Dengerink et al’s (2015) study in The Netherlands, and Guberman and Mcdossi’s (2019) study in Israel, the minority of teacher educators that were active researchers did also contribute to the knowledge base of teacher education (Guberman & Mcdossi, 2019).

In summary, research by teacher educators is recognised as important for their professional development and as a contribution to the knowledge base within the field (Willemse & Boei, 2013). Teacher educators who are involved in research, in order to enhance their own practice, are able to distinguish the benefits for their professional learning, and are more critical of methods and outcomes. Developing researcherly dispositions is critical, and specific instruments may be useful aids in this process. More recent work from Tack and Vanderlinde (2019) emphasizes the importance of feeling fulfilled, connected and valued in the workplace, and that having a sense of ‘relatedness’ is an important predictor of the extent to which teacher educators conduct research within their role.

The traits necessary in developing a teacher educator’s research identity include having a strong personal interest, a positive attitude, and a sense of urgency, and these traits need to be informed by values and missions; while similarly, “our habits are context responsive” (Nelson, 2015, p.88). Teacher educators who are involved in research, in order to enhance their own practice, are able to distinguish the benefits for their professional learning, and are more critical of methods and outcomes. Developing researcherly dispositions is of course critical, and specific instruments, such as the self-reporting questionnaire (TERDS) and Kreijns et al (2019) inquiry-habits dimensions may be useful aids in this process.

Teacher educator standards

In the Netherlands, a ‘Professional Standard of Teacher Educators’ has been presented as a frame of reference which includes a set of fundamental principles and four competency areas (Melief et al, 2012). The competency areas are holistic for all teacher educators within this context. The framework professionalises the industry of teacher educators in the Netherlands,

and the principles provide a tool for professional learning. The fundamental principles of competence in the field of pedagogy, supervising professional learning, organisation and management, and in developmental competence are broken down into sub-categories and descriptors. Although the framework itself is descriptive, the language used is broad and wide-ranging. The Dutch Standards promote attitudinal characteristics such as having a ‘questioning attitude’, ‘is reflective’, and ‘takes responsibility’; and their model comprises ten domains of knowledge separated into core domains, specific domains, and extended domains.

The Flemish Standards are similar, with descriptors of behaviour, identity, and statements relating to knowledge and understanding within the profession. In the USA, the Association for Teacher Educators has 5 standards of reference for teacher educators: 1) teaching, which specifically describes ‘model teaching’ and the ability to demonstrate best practices; 2) applying ‘cultural competence’ and promoting social justice; 3) scholarship and research; 4) professional development; and 5) programme development (Table 1).

Table 1 Comparison of teacher educator standards

Standards	Content of standards	Gaps
Model of Dutch Standards (VELON)	Identity, knowledge and understanding, behaviours, pedagogy of teacher education, coaching, theory and practice, developing expertise.	Developing research skills, intercultural competence and social justice.
Flemish (VELOV)	Supervising learning and development, pedagogy, content of professional development, theory and practice.	Developing research skills, intercultural competence and social justice.
The Association of Teacher Educators (USA)	Teaching, professional competencies, proficiency with technology, professional inquiry, programme development, cultural competence and the promotion of social justice.	Emphasis on research, research identity and research skills.

All three frames of reference refer to identity, knowledge, and understanding; along with criteria for professional practice and domains of pedagogy for teacher education. The main difference between them is the ‘cultural competencies’ identified in the USA, and the focus on social justice. All the models lack a focus on teacher educators’ researcherly dispositions, as well as any in-depth illustration of research as a crucial driving factor in personal learning. Instead, the models tend to focus more on behaviours related to coaching and on facilitating practice, rather than on creating professional knowledge within the context or on the behaviours necessary for developing professional knowledge in practice.

The Flemish Standards provide a useful teacher educator development profile, with dimensions that include the mastery of skills, awareness of choices, technical repertoire, communication, and a connection to worldviews. The development profile incorporates the fundamentals of a teacher educator’s role, and while the statements conform to the Flemish Standards, they provide a useful lens for viewing teacher educator knowledge and how it might be organised in the UAE. In contrast to the other standards and models, the Flemish development profiles contain a section on “being an innovator and researcher” and list

several knowledge and understanding statements that are broad in application but nonetheless relate to a teacher educator's ability to consume and produce research (VELOV, 2012, p.13). The development profile also highlights the dispositions of awareness, and a teacher educator's ability to be "aware of the choices that they and other people make and can clearly state what the ideas, conceptions, beliefs, research on which these choices are based are." (VELOV, 2012, p.15), and the importance of communication, and possessing a technical repertoire to solve complex problems. In amongst this skill set, the development profile states that teacher educators should "be able to think critically about the place of education in the society" (VELOV, 2012, p.15).

As the profile was developed in Belgium, it may have been created with the assumption that the teacher educators were already in a position to conduct research, and therefore, there was no need to examine the psychological aspects of this aspect of the role. The development profile may provide useful content on the areas that teacher educators should be able to demonstrate, but it lacks the 'how' side of things and neglects the cognitive or affective dimensions needed for the role in the UAE.

The relationships between society, culture, support structures, and personal psychological needs, together with the confidence to conduct research are essential dimensions of the teacher educator's learning process, and the development profiles that have emerged from the European settings allow us to view this perspective more clearly.

How teacher educators learn

The nature of *how* teacher educators learn and *what* they should learn is a re-occurring theme in the literature of the last decade (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2019). Indeed, researchers over the past two decades have developed ideas around how teacher educators work, and how their professional learning might be conceptualised. Ping et al's (2017) review of professional learning for teacher educators identifies four main categories of content within the learning: 1) the pedagogy of teacher education, which involves incorporating knowledge and skills for teaching while taking into account the beliefs and experiences that affect student teachers; 2) how teacher educators value research, together with their capacity for, and awareness of reflection; 3) teacher educator identity, and how teacher educators cultivate future teachers and *their* research identity—and 4) contextual factors, working environments and the various knowledge domains related to teachers, recognising that teacher educators require specific knowledge, skills and attitudes that are different to those of teachers. Ping et al's review also synthesises studies according to professional learning activities such as learning through academic engagement, collaboration, attending workshops and through reflective activities. The review gives details of studies on the reasons for professional learning, with personal ambition and the need to improve one's knowledge base receiving greater emphasis from researchers. A limitation of the study is that it is restricted to those teacher educators working within initial teacher training programmes in higher education institutes. The arguments within the study also focussed on conceptual models of learning that are intended for wider audiences, as opposed to blueprint models that are contextually focussed, and more behavioural in their design (Rust, 2018).

The education needs of teacher educators differ according to the career stage, and the appropriate education methods also differ according to the position of the teacher educator within the professional continuum (Meeus et al, 2017). Many beginning as teacher educators learn in order to educate student teachers on the job, for instance, by discussing problems in their teaching with colleagues and by “experimenting with new ideas in their daily practice” (Ping et al, 2017, p.2). Within Meeus et al’s (2017) study, those who become teacher educators early in their career “tend to learn more formally with training, and as they progressed, their involvement in learning communities and in collaborative practice becomes more prominent” (Meeus et al, 2017, p.25). The success of learning communities depends on the openness of the members and of their willingness to learn from each other’s strengths and concerns by sharing constructive experiences with each other (p.18). Meeus et al’s (2017) research was conducted in Belgium, in an environment with established structures for collaboration and cooperation. A positive outcome in this research is that teacher educators also need autonomy to shape their own processes and choices of professional learning (p.27).

The likelihood of effective professional learning increases when a combination of individual professional learning and professional learning in teams is pursued. By discussing their own authentic teaching practices with fellow educators, teacher educators with a researcherly disposition are able to connect their self-study to the development of a knowledge base within the educational community (Meeus et al, 2017, p.27). The fear of change, as well as a lack of innovative ideas and the reluctance of teacher educators to leave their comfort zone, are factors that have often hindered learning, however (Van der Klink et al., 2017).

The ‘Dynamics of Professional Learning’ model, presented within Kelchtermans et al’s (2018) research, frames a range of concepts, themes, and key questions. The model is meant to be iterative; the concentric circles reflecting movement and the dynamics of professional learning along with the inevitable situated-ness of the context (Figure 2).

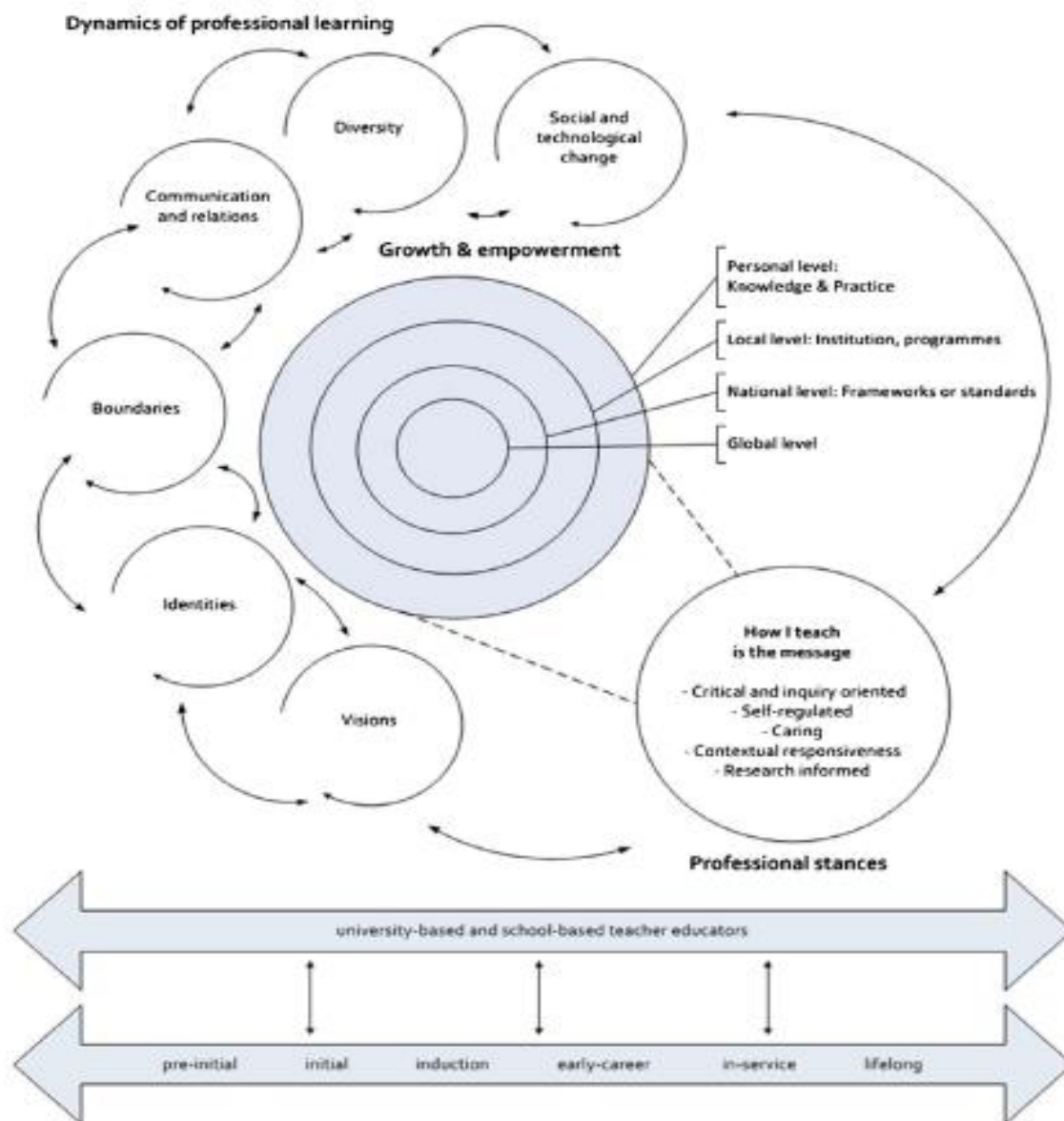


Figure 2 Dynamics of Professional Learning
Source: Kelchtermans et al (2018)

Within the model, “personal judgment, personal knowledge and beliefs as well as the repertoire of skills and attitudes of the individual professional” are central in reflecting on and understanding practices (Kelchtermans et al, 2018, p.127). This model conveys a strong message of values, themes, empowerment, and relationships, similar to the literature on researcherly dispositions except that it does not focus on the research identity component of a teacher educator (Kelchtermans et al, 2018). Whilst the identity component may be important for teacher educators who are working within initial teacher training settings, or aspiring to, the necessity to have the disposition to inquire, reflect and to be reflexive may be more important for teacher educators in the field, in the UAE. Additionally, the self-regulated growth and empowerment element as well as the contextual responsiveness present resemble Tack and Vanderlinde’s (2019) representation of autonomy, personal responsibility, and work-related outcomes. Furthermore, the model emphasises the local contexts within the wider national system. The relationships between the elements in the model are not linear,

and the cyclical movement, along with personal judgements, determine the foci of learning. The model also contains a non-exhaustive list of content domains such as boundaries, communications, identities, and visions; but comes with the caution that it is not intended as a blueprint for teacher educators.

A benefit of this model is the shared language it contains together with the shared understandings between the professional colleagues who may use it. Interestingly, as indicated above, the research-informed component is given less attention than others. Teacher educator learning should include exposure to big ideas and worldviews that include ethical, political, and philosophical viewpoints; in order to provide a strong foundation for self-critique and engagement with different people and perspectives that are “not neutral intellectual endeavours” (Kelchtermans et al, 2018, p.128). The task of comparing a detailed behavioural model such as this—as a cognitive representation of thinking between different dimensions with the Flemish development profile that uses ‘I can statements’, is less theoretical and includes more context-specific factors, has made me consider whether my learning can be captured with either model.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

To address my research aims, I selected narrative inquiry as my research methodology because of its theory/practice/reflection cycle of inquiry (Kim, 2016) that offers broad access to different disciplinary traditions (ESRC, 2008, p.7). This methodology has received growing attention as it has challenged traditional research approaches that claim greater validity. It falls within the qualitative research paradigm because narratives are “social, relational, and infused with power relations” (O'Toole, 2018, p.178), whilst also being “rigorous, creative, and political” (Trahar, 2013, xxi) at the same time.

Narrative provides the human mind with a means to make sense of the world through processes of reflection (Craig, 2009) that are situated alongside inquiry; thereby serving both as a research method and a form of representation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990).

Based on my knowledge of the education context, I took an open-ended stance to my research design. Inquiry is a negotiated process, and the process of thinking narratively and inquiring involves an ontological commitment (Caine et al, 2013). I gathered data about my own professional learning from my work with teacher educators, and teachers. In talking to my participants and recognising the challenges they face within the context, I observed the potential and value in creating a narrative about the professional space in which we were operating. This task could not be approached through traditional forms of knowing. While narrative approaches are not appropriate for studies of large numbers of nameless and faceless subjects, they can capture the rich and deep nature of experiences and the nuances of my personal narrative and the narratives of my participants more meaningfully than other methodological frameworks (Riessman, 2005).

As narrative research is still a maturing field with few tight methodological and definitional prescriptions (Latta & Kim, 2009) and no “overall rules about suitable materials, modes of

investigation” (Andrews et al, 2013, p.1), the onus is on the researcher to articulate how they gathered and analysed the data in a transparent manner.

Selection of participants

The participants in this study were selected as people I had worked with in various capacities and because I was able to access their professional lives within the context of my professional roles as a teacher educator.

Table 2 The Participants

Name	Position	School/Location	Nationality
Ahmed	School Social Worker	Government school in Al Ain	Egyptian
Stephen	Head of History	Private school, UK curriculum, Dubai	British
Phillip	Deputy Head of P.E	Private school, UK curriculum, Dubai	British
Sarah	Head of Kindergarten (teacher educator)	Private school, US curriculum, Dubai	British
Salem	English Teacher	Private school, US curriculum, Dubai	Syrian
Michael	Head of CPD (Teacher educator)	Private school, UK curriculum, Sharjah	British

Table 3 Overview of data collected

Data
Personal writing from my blog and Organisation 1 newsletter
Personal writing from my blog
Contextual data in the form of excerpts from a report
Survey data from the Lead Practitioner Accreditation pre-course questionnaire (43 teachers)
Interview data from two teachers in a school in Dubai
Narrative accounts from two teachers, one in Sharjah and one in Dubai
Narrative account from one teacher in a school in Dubai
Survey data from the UAE Learning Network (525 teachers)
Personal narrative writing from my diary
Excerpts from emails (contextual data)
Excerpts from reports (contextual data)
Email communication between myself and a school principal in Dubai

Table 3 presents an overview of the data that emerged from this research.

Narrative interviews

A key method of collecting data within this study was the narrative interview. The interviews were central to the kinds of stories told and collected (O'Toole, 2018). Professional conversations can be facilitated by different enablers such as interview tools that shape the quality and content of the conversation (Timperley, 2018). The co-constructed nature of interviewing and analysis was a vital aspect of this study enabling “further insights ... to be

revealed and progressed” through listening (Taylor, 2017, p.103) Involving an exploration, both for the researcher and the participants, the co-constructed nature of interviewing and analysis is, therefore, a vital aspect of this study. As the participants were sharing their experiences of schools in the UAE, I listened and interacted with them flexibly to allow the stories to be related as fully as possible (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007).

I conducted this research with the assumption that I have co-constructed the participants’ narratives and the participants have re-presented their experiences (Riessman, 2008). I define this approach as ‘conversational sensitivity’ because the set-up and style are crucial to the interaction that takes places. This required cultural sensitivity, given the cultural diversity of the participants. In the narrative development process, I also became my own narrator whilst constructing the narratives of others (ESRC, 2008). I am aware that my interactions with the participants happened in a particular place in time, and they may have resulted in changes to those participants and their environments.

Collecting data involved the use of unstructured interviews and the exploration of texts and field notes. I felt that a single narrative would not be sufficient to unpack a participant’s narrative, as it might not take into account the range of contexts where a teacher or teacher candidate must self-position (Rice, 2011). Good narrative research through interviews entails interpretation, which begins during the interview itself. The interpretation can be fluid, but requires careful listening and engagement, and even then, the transcripts may not accurately demonstrate the context or the unfiltered truth (Riessman, 2008).

Writing about interviews always comes from specific perspectives, and the ‘truth’ it represents may never be completely objective. In written communication, the reader may come to a different understanding, rather than a misunderstanding (Bolton, 2010). Writing creates closer contact with emotions, thoughts, and experiences (Bolton, 2010), and the writing in narrative inquiry is part of the analysis and the reflexive process (Conle, 2000).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In light of the diversity of narrative research, there is no single approach to narrative analysis (Squire, 2008). How the analysis is done depends once more on the researcher’s idea of what constitutes ‘narrative’ (ESRC, 2008). Life stories need to be subjected to multiple forms of analysis as the stories are multi-dimensional and complex; they are constructed, and change with time and context (Smith & Sparkes, 2005). Data “must be translated into words so that they can be accounted for and interpreted” (qtd. in Byrne, 2017, p.39), but certain elements may be difficult to capture, such as senses, emotions, and responses.

The analysis of stories generally involves a multi-layered approach with a focus on form (how the story is told), content (what is said in the story), and context (wherein the story is produced and told), in order to illustrate the dimensions of temporality, defined as the “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.50) in which the researcher moves between the different dimensions. Accordingly, the narratives of experience are constructed within the dimensions of ‘personal/social’ and ‘place’ that constitute

temporality (O'Toole, 2018, p.177). The researcher can move from the outside to the inside during the data collection, analysis and representation stages (Byrne, 2017, p38). By its nature, narrative analysis is sometimes slow and painstaking; requiring attention to subtleties such as the nuances of speech, the organisation of a response, the relations between the researcher and subject, and the social and historical contexts. It is cultural narratives that make 'personal' stories possible. In a reflexive turn, researchers at the same time produce their own narratives by relating their biographies to their research materials (Riessman, 2002). Furthermore, different modes of thematic, structural, and interactional analysis may be appropriate within narrative research (Riessman, 2005; Kim, 2016; Bold, 2012). I have used elements of all three types of analysis and my interpretations of interactions in the data I have collected represent my choices made at a moment in time, and remain a constant source of material.

Findings

The challenge of conducting research as a teacher educator in the field within the complex context of the UAE has forced me to adapt to my surroundings. As an outsider to UAE culture, a non-Arabic speaker, and a Western expatriate, I am aware that my interpretations are from the perspective of my values and my perception of the context. Ryan and Daly (2017) describe the UAE as an environment where engagement and critical thinking are lacking, due to the fact that UAE society is extremely private, and the country has existed in its current state for only forty-five years. By working in this environment, I have been fortunate enough to work with teacher educators and teachers, both in the public sector in Arab settings, and with Arab and Western teachers in the private sector. By conducting research in all these contexts, I feel privileged to have observed the different practices in all of them, and in turn, this experience has enabled me to evaluate my own limitations within the sector, and in the society-at-large.

As a result of my awareness of my standing as a UAE resident who is not able to gain citizenship to the country, and due to my awareness of the nature of limited-term contracts, government-funded projects, and the fragility and uncertainty of the sector, I have personally sought agency whilst conducting this research.

This may appear to be an on-going personal tension, as on one hand, I have sought to be in control of my personal situation, as a result of my self-awareness, but at the same time, I have sought challenges in unfamiliar roles, and workplaces. With each experience, I have learnt about the contextual and structural challenges of conducting research and working as an education professional in the UAE. This has motivated me to learn more about each dimension of the sector so that I am able to make informed decisions about my professional career, and therefore, more educated decisions about my learning, and the learning of others.

I do believe that as a result of working in a neo-liberal context, driven by market-led approaches to education, that I have personally sought empowerment and ownership of my own situation. Teacher educators in the UAE may have to decide where they wish to position themselves in the sector, in terms of their employment, in order to develop their skills. I

believe that teacher educators and teachers need to be aware of the context, and specifically their statuses as non-citizens in order to fully empower themselves in the UAE.

At times, I have demonstrated ‘strategic anticipation’ which is the “capability to determine and the ability to implement a strategy that is highly responsive to an unpredictable and potentially volatile environment” (The Economist, 2012, p.16). Therefore, a different set of researcherly dispositions may be more relevant to the UAE context because of the cultural, social, and economic differences within workplace settings.

My research aims have emerged by reflecting on the professional attributes and research skills I have gained, whilst considering Kelchtermans (2018) model which is broad, and dynamic in nature, and Tack and Vanderlinde’s (2014, 2019) and Kreijn’s (2019) researcherly dispositions which are accessible and they have enabled me to reflect on the psychological challenges of conducting research in the UAE. This may help others to navigate un-familiar contexts whilst attempting to support teachers and teacher educators’ professional learning. The teacher educator framework which I share in the next section addresses a gap in the research on teacher educators because it includes dispositions that I believe are relevant to the international sector and the wider context of the UAE, a country that is not widely known for its research culture (Ryan & Daly, 2017).

5. A Potential UAE Teacher Educator Framework

The process of reflecting between my data, the UAE education context, and the literature has enabled me to conceptualise a set of dispositions and a framework. In order to create this framework, I drew on Kelchtermans (2018) ‘Dynamics of Professional Learning’ model, together with the Flemish Teacher Educator Development Profile (2012) and Killick’s (2013) notion of self in the world as a means to develop cultural competence. Distinct areas of my professional practice have emerged and I have captured these within domains to indicate that progression of knowledge is possible across these development areas, which comprise:

Inter-cultural competency

I define context and relationships as the ability to navigate the different cultural, economic, and education settings of the UAE and interact with people within these environments. Within my professional roles, I have to demonstrate an ability to work not only with Emirati teachers, but also with Arab and South Asian expatriate teachers, and to recognise the educational and cultural nuances of each, within both the public and private sectors; and therefore to adapt my behaviour for each context. I have categorised the domains in Table 4 from beginner to mastery to indicate the various levels of the potential progression of knowledge (see Table 4).

Table 4 Inter-cultural competency domains

Beginner	Intermediate	Mastery
Awareness of the different education settings within the UAE, public, and private sectors.	Awareness of the different education settings within the public and private sectors in the UAE, and ability to access key	Ability to use knowledge of the diverse education contexts, and leverage key stakeholders in order to further personal and

Awareness of the different communities that exist within the UAE.	stakeholders in both settings. Awareness of the different communities in the UAE and ability to build relationships with people within these communities.	collective interests. Ability to access different communities and leverage relationships to further personal and collective objectives.
Awareness that different regulations exist for the public and private sectors.	Awareness of how different regulations exist and ability to respond to key stakeholders with support in light of the regulations.	Ability to provide tailored responses to key stakeholders within the context.
Awareness of some of the needs of Arab expatriate teachers working within the public and private sectors, and of the cultural differences that exist.	Awareness of some of the needs of Arab expatriate teachers working in the public and private sectors and ability to adapt one's thinking to support their needs in either sector.	Awareness of the needs, challenges and opportunities of working with Arab expatriate teachers within the public and private sector and ability to demonstrate cognitive flexibility to further their professional learning.
Awareness of some of the needs of Western expatriate teachers working within the public and private sectors.	Awareness of some of the needs of Western expatriate teachers working within the public and private sectors, and ability to adapt one's thinking to support their needs in either sector.	Awareness of the needs, challenges and opportunities present when working with Western expatriate teachers within the public and private sectors, and ability to demonstrate cognitive flexibility to further their professional learning.
Awareness of the economic structures and nature of employment contracts in the UAE.	Awareness of the economic structures and nature of employment contracts in the UAE, and the ability to write about the context.	Awareness of the economic structures and nature of employment contracts in the UAE, and the ability to make personal decisions that enable insightful decision making within the structures.

Access to people and information

I define 'access' as the ability to: 1) gain access to different groups of teachers within different settings, 2) to build relationships with them, 3) engage teachers in key issues within the profession in order to gain their insights, and 4) create opportunities for dialogue and engagement between teachers (Table 5).

Table 5 Progression of the ability to access people and information

Beginner	Intermediate	Mastery
Awareness of different groups of teachers and ability to access some of them.	Ability to access different groups of teachers and conduct research with them.	Ability to conduct research with different groups of teachers and disseminate the research with different audiences to influence

		decision-making.
Ability to engage in sharing others' research with teachers.	Ability to engage in sharing others' research, and ability to share organic research conducted with teachers.	Ability to create opportunities for others to conduct research within the sector.
Ability to work with different teacher educators and teachers to develop conversations around professional dialogue.	Ability to develop and create professional dialogue within the context.	Ability to create new professional knowledge within the context of the UAE and engage others in discussions.

Uncertainty and Time

This ability involves recognising and strategically anticipating changes in the profession. I also define it as the ability to 1) adapt to different professional roles and maintain positive relationships with key stakeholders, 2) respond to opportunities in order to collect data that may have limited availability, and 3) adapt to changes within the sector and make an impact (Table 5).

Table 5 Progression of the ability to develop awareness

Beginner	Intermediate	Mastery
Awareness of my organisation's funding model, how it generates income, and how my employment contracts fits in with this model.	Awareness of my organisation's funding model, how it generates income and how my employment contracts fits in with this model, together with the ability to plan ahead to benefit from my awareness.	Awareness of my organisation's funding model, how it generates income and how my employment contract fits in with this model, as well as the ability to plan ahead to benefit from my awareness, and to act upon this in time.
Awareness of how to change my employment situation within the UAE laws.	Ability to change my employment situation within the UAE laws without negatively affecting my personal situation.	Ability to change my employment situation within the UAE laws and navigate different professional settings with confidence.
Ability to recognise opportunities to collect data that may enable me to conduct research within the profession.	Ability to collect data within the various situations that may arise, and produce research reports that influence decision making with key stakeholders.	Ability to create research opportunities based upon situations that may arise and that require research to be conducted in order to influence decision making with key stakeholders.
Ability to recognize when changes within the profession may affect my organisation, my personal situation, or my employment.	Ability to recognise when changes occur within the profession that may affect my organisation, my personal situation, or my employment; and the ability to respond by strengthening my own personal situation through changing my employment position.	Ability to predict changes within the profession that may affect my organisation, my personal situation, and my employment; and the ability to respond by strengthening my own personal situation through changing my employment position and the personal situation of others.

The domains represent a hierarchy of knowledge of specific domains that have enabled my learning to develop in-depth. I present the framework in Figure 3. The concentric circles are inter-connected as they are inter-dependent aspects of developing personal empowerment.

The applicability of each domain relies on the ability to be aware of the context and to build work with urgency, as in neo-liberal contexts, time is critical and change often happens at a rapid pace.

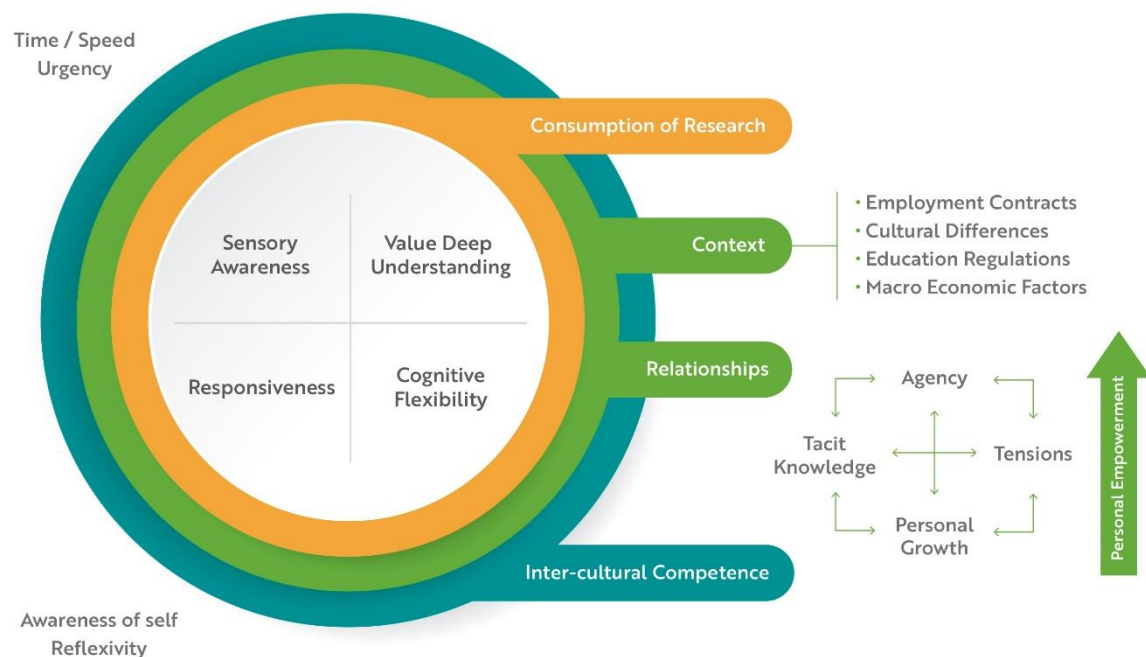


Figure 3 A Potential UAE Teacher Educator Framework

Source: Author's own.

Summary of the framework

My learning has been iterative throughout this research, so this framework is intended to be understood as iterative, with movement between the concentric circles at a cognitive and behavioural level when greater awareness is gained. At the heart of the main circle are the researcherly dispositions that have been essential to my research and professional roles as well as to my personal learning. I have used descriptive headings for these dispositions that I believe are helpful for understanding them. The first one, 'value deep understanding', is modelled on Kreijns (2019); whilst 'cognitive flexibility' is an inter-cultural competency from Huber et al (2014). I have also added in 'responsiveness' and 'sensory awareness' which have emerged in this research. Whilst conducting this research I have been responsive to the context, the participants, and the data, whilst gaining a greater awareness of my place within UAE society. This has made me more aware, and therefore, I have sought to leverage my awareness by making strategic decisions about my career. The researcherly dispositions are explained below:

Researcherly Dispositions

Value Deep Understanding

1. I am critical on whether I did the right thing.

2. I wonder if I can improve my work.
3. I watch how colleagues do things in order to learn from them.
4. I ask others for their opinion of my work.
5. I try to collect information so I can evaluate my work.
6. I can empathise with different teachers from different cultures.

Cognitive Flexibility

1. I can recognise myself in different contexts and how I may be perceived by others.
2. I try to view things from other perspectives.
3. I can adapt my thinking for different cultures and environments.
4. I can recognise power structures that have enabled others to view me, and can adapt my behaviours to cater for this and produce better outcomes.

Responsiveness

1. I can respond in a timely manner to changes in my context and situation.
2. I can respond to teacher educators, and teachers' needs in light of their contextual challenges.
3. I can respond to changes in my own personal situation and maintain positive relationships with all stakeholders.

Awareness

1. I am alert to research opportunities within all aspects of my context.
2. I can sense when research may be used to influence decision making or my own personal situation.
3. I can see when I need to work faster and leverage relationships to produce or consume research.

Context and relationships are critical factors outside these psychological dispositions, and the wider context and smaller micro-contexts have been critical to my learning. The public sector, for example, has a large number of Arab expatriate teachers who have chosen to work with Emirati children. This professional setting is culturally different to the international sector within the UAE. The teachers that work within the public sector are in the midst of their own personal and professional stories and may not be aware of developments outside their immediate contexts. The skill set required to work with these teachers is primarily a communicative one, and at the same time, working within this context has challenged my worldview.

The private sector, which varies from emirate to emirate, is also diverse, with notable differences between the numerous education spaces. Western expatriate teachers working in the private sector are often operating within their own school communities. An awareness of the relevant regulations and political issues within the private sector has been an important feature of this research. Therefore, the decisions I have made in relation to my research were based on a wider view of the private sector's current status.

When working with individual teachers, it has been imperative to know their demographic details—contract length, nationality, and years of experience—to allow for more accurate decisions with regards to their professional learning. As the majority of teachers operate on two-year contracts, professional learning not only has to be impactful, but must also provide a return on investment. Without knowing the wider demographics of the country, together with the smaller demographics of the individual teacher, we are at-risk of making poor decisions that may be costly in the long run. As with narrative research, the knowledge base about the context is always evolving, so it is difficult to define the appropriate knowledge needed. It is nonetheless imperative, however, that teacher educators know about the public and private sectors, and how they operate, as well as the demographic details of the schools and teachers they choose to work with.

Building networks is a valuable method of forming relationships, either in person or online. Professional networks have proved invaluable to me, as teachers have often relayed regulatory changes ahead of time, and as such, helped me to respond appropriately. These networks have also provided me with valuable insights into the lives of teachers in different locations across the country. In turn, these insights have enabled me to empathise with teachers and learn about the specific challenges arising within the profession in the UAE.

Time and Urgency

I acknowledge the importance of time and urgency as psychological factors that influence my professional role (Eraut, 2004). As I have moved roles, as a result of my awareness of my position and self within UAE society, this has meant that I have taken decisions about my data collection methods from the perspective that my access to people and places may have an expiration point (Sparkes and Stewart, 2016). This has meant that narrative research is better suited to research in this context, rather than a traditional approach which favours a structured research design. The fluidity of movement—both with and between the agility domains—is reliant upon these factors. As I have gained knowledge about teachers, schools, regulations, and sector-specific information, I have needed to build momentum in, and awareness of, all the components in order to respond to challenges as well as gain further work.

Researcherly dispositions lie at the heart of the framework. This is underpinned by an understanding of the importance of time, and relationships, and an appreciation of the contribution of tacit knowledge and agency to my personal growth. Working through tensions may and discomfort as I navigated boundaries discomfort has led me to feel personally empowered, and with greater knowledge about myself.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This framework may not be complete or a scalable model yet. It does, however, represent a potential area of future research. In order to professionalise the industry in the UAE, this may represent a starting point for policy makers, regulators, and the wider profession. As the UAE continues to make progress in international research rankings in higher education, the time

might be appropriate to develop a framework necessary to capture the nuances of professional practice.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest with this paper.

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