DO YOU MEET YOUR STUDENTS OR YOURSELF?
Reflection on professional identity as an essential component of teacher education

Fred Korthagen
Hildelien Verkuyl
IVLOS, Utrecht University

Introduction

We have both been working in teacher education for more than 25 years now, and during these years we have both been fascinated by promoting reflection in teachers, even long before this became a hype. However, over the years we also started to become a bit worried by the fact that often reflection in teacher education did not seem to touch the deeper layers in our student teachers that seemed to be important to their identity as a teacher. Most teacher educators restrict themselves to promoting reflection on behavior, competencies and perhaps beliefs about teaching and learning. We saw many of our student teachers, who were often fairly competent on these levels, struggle with themselves, especially in their final teaching practice were they had full responsibility for teaching a limited number of classes in school.

In line with authors such as Allender (2001), Bullough (1997), Palmer (1998) and many others, we believe that they were confronted with what is called the teacher's self, and that these student teachers should become more aware of their inner selves in order to contribute in an adequate way to children's learning, growth and well-being. One aspect of this is reflecting on one's own patterns of survival behavior as a teacher, patterns that often surface when tensions in the classroom grow. Awareness of these patterns can be a starting point for asking oneself what one is more than those patterns and which inner potential (we talk about 'core qualities') is waiting for actualization.

The aim of our collaborative study was to find out whether we could help especially those student teachers, who during this last stage of their preparation for the profession often struggled with their role as a teacher and who sometimes wondered whether they would really become a teacher (and what kind of teacher) and whether they would be able to realize the ideals they had in mind when they chose to enroll in teacher education. Our goal was to offer these student teachers insight into their own professional identity and a renewed sense of mission.

From the very beginning it was clear to us that we could not undertake this enterprise without questioning our own professional identities and missions as teacher educators. One cannot help others to look closer at their own inner selves, if one is not used to doing this oneself, and without being acquainted with the fears, obstacles and joys inherent to such a quest. For that reason we engaged in an intensive joint process during which we promoted each other's reflection on our behavior as teacher educators and our own inner potentials, as they surfaced during the preparation and actual giving of the workshop. Moreover, we decided that it was necessary to also share with the student teachers elements of our own professional struggles, past and present. We kept track of our own journey related to this enterprise, and repeatedly questioned each other, especially on issues such as our own ideals in education and the deeper sources of our ways of functioning as teacher educators.

We also asked the students to record their learning processes during the workshop in logbooks. Finally, we evaluated the whole enterprise with them, both orally and by means of a questionnaire.

Below we report about our study. We started our journey with clarifying our theoretical starting points and own philosophy of (teacher) education. The next section is devoted to a discussion of

this framework.

Theoretical framework and philosophy of education

A view of reflection
Reflection is generally acknowledged to be an important instrument in teacher development (Calderhead, 1989). However, in many teacher education programs the emphasis is often placed on a fairly instrumental interpretation of reflection: the stress accompanying the initial steps along the professional path and the need to survive in the midst of a multitude of intensive experiences often lead the student teacher to concentrate on the problem of how to handle tomorrow's lesson. Klaassen (2002) maintains that such teachers are failing to fulfil their social-pedagogical task. We believe that he is right. In our view there is no longer any doubt that as a teacher one does indeed have a social-pedagogical task to fulfil. It is there, whether you acknowledge it or not (Fenstermacher, 1994). Hence, we see it as the responsibility of teacher educators to create conditions that help student teachers develop a view of the moral aspects of the teaching profession and of their own social-pedagogical task. In this context, a major role must be reserved for reflection on one's own professional identity and one's social-pedagogical goals and responsibility. The focus of the present paper is the promotion of such reflection among student teachers, reflection on their personal interpretation of the goals of the profession and on their own professional mission. We consider this of particular importance in view of the highly socializing influence of the school context (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). The question is whether it is possible to counterbalance that influence and to help teachers to develop a professional identity of their own.
In our view, the crux lies at the point where the development of one's own identity as a human being intersects with one's professional development (compare Nias, 1989a and 1989b, p. 202-203; see also Allender, 2001). For example, we believe that it is important for teachers to become aware of their own strong points (their core qualities) and the personal values they are striving for, and how best to give shape to them.

The underlying philosophy
The process by which human beings become aware of their own unique personal qualities, learn to handle those qualities in their contact with the outside world, and ultimately become an individual distinguishable from other human beings, is what Jung (1964) called *individuation*. Maslow (1968) employs the related concept *self-actualization.* Independent of the degree to which people choose for the road less traveled or adaptation, they cannot be themselves without others. For example, it is precisely in the meeting with others that we realize that we are different, that we become aware of our uniqueness, and acquire the capacity for further development (Taylor, 1989).

The reason that we consider the individuation process so important for student teachers has to do with a social-pedagogical philosophy. One of the central aims of education is, in our view, to ensure that students of every race, social class, sex and age are aware of, and give shape to, their own inner potential, strength, talents, value, and dignity, whereby others, including teachers, can provide support and guidance. To fulfil that task, teachers must consciously experience their own process of development, with all the accompanying crises. Jung calls this the principle of the 'wounded healer' (Read e.a., 1966, section 239).

Professional identity
Teaching and guiding children offers a valuable mirror for anyone who takes the time and effort

to hold it up to himself. It makes possible the next essential developmental step: dealing with the question 'who am I and how do I reflect who I am'?

Beijaard (1995) indicates that up until recently little research has been done into the professional identity of teachers and the manner in which they develop that professional identity. Tickle (1999, p. 123) says: "In policy and practice the identification and development of personal qualities, at the interface between aspects of one's personal virtues and one's professional life, between personhood and teacherhood, if you will, has had scant attention." An exception is the work of Kelchtermans, who emphasizes the importance of professional *self-understanding* of teachers (e.g. Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994, p. 89) and the role of *critical incidents, phases and individuals* in the professional development of teachers. Another recent exception is Allender (2001) who shows how teacher educators can help student teachers to explore issues related to the teacher's self.

The workshop

In our research wanted to go further than only carrying out a theoretical study. The themes sketched above affected our own practice as teacher educators and in fact our own professional identity. We decided to develop a workshop consisting of four half-day sessions (plus homework) which was held at the end of the one-year teacher education program.

The title of the workshop was "Do you meet your students or yourself?" This apparently hit the nail on the head: many student teachers said that was precisely the question they had been wrestling with. In the workshop we took this as our point of departure for a reflective process. We made it clear that a crisis is an opportunity, an opportunity to find out a bit more about who you actually are and what you should be doing in the classroom.

A total of 15 students registered for the workshop.

In the session at the Castle conference, we demonstrate some of the structures we used in the workshop. An important exercise is the 'discrepancy analysis', which starts with the simple but highly effective question: *Think about one positive and one negative experience during your practice teaching. What is the difference between these two experiences?*

The participants are divided into groups and get an assignment that helps to further clarify the difference between the positive and the negative experience. At the end of the exercise they are asked to complete one of the following statements:

I am someone who needs ... .
I am someone who considers …. important.
I am someone who strives for ... .

In order to give the exercise additional depth, we introduce a model of levels of reflection, and adaptation of the Bateson model (Korthagen et al., 2001, p. 267). The following levels are distinguished: (1) *Environment* (What do I encounter?); (2) *Behavior* (What do I do?); (3) *Competencies* (What am I good at?); (4) *Beliefs* (What do I believe in?); (5) *Identity* (who am I?); (6) *Mission (or spirituality)* (Why do I exist? What greater entity do I feel connected with?).

In groups of three, the participants help each other to determine at which level or levels their questions and dilemmas lay. During this exercise it can become clear that the higher levels influence the lower levels. For example, the resolve not to act as a policeman in the classroom will determine the characteristics you want to develop and your subsequent behavior, and thus your environment. By contrast, the confrontation with the environment (such as a difficult class)

will make it clear that you are not at liberty to display the behavior you want to; you may then have a desire to develop certain competencies. This, in turn, can lead you to ask yourself to what extent you can be yourself in the classroom, and who that 'self' actually is. Via the confrontation with the environment, the process can continue right up to the highest level, touching on such questions as how to give meaning to one's work (level of mission).

One student teacher wrote:

> *I want to learn how to be clear and maintain classroom order. This is a point that came up in the 'environment'. It was related to 'competencies'. I had to expand my behavioral repertoire in dealing with a group. It's not so much about my identity, since in day-to-day environments people often say that I'm bossy and strict. The classroom setting itself demanded strictness and clarity.*
> *Positive thinking and learning to cope with the unexpected have to do with identity. Often I'm restless or I try to do a lot in a short time. And I've never been that sure of myself. I tend to be intimidated by people who have a lot of self-confidence. Often a whole class draws its self-confidence from sheer numbers.*
> *Trying to find - and keep - some peace and quiet (in myself) also has to do with 'competencies'. I have to learn certain forms of behavior in a group that up to now I've had difficulty mastering.*

Evaluation

How successful was the experimental workshop? Of course we evaluated our enterprise carefully, both orally and by means of a questionnaire.

The 15 student teachers who enrolled in our workshop were enthusiastic about it, especially about the fact that it touched on aspects of their professional development that they experienced as fundamental, but that had not been dealt with before during their preparation program. The theme of the workshop hit the very aspects they struggled with, and helped them to learn from these struggles. Some reactions were:

- The pieces of the puzzle fell into place;
- The workshop hit the core: we talked about the essence of being a teacher;
- This should be a standard element in the teacher education program;
- This stimulates your professional growth, as you are forced to look at the essentials of what happened during your teaching practice.

On a five-point scale 77% of the students scored the workshop a 4 (good) and 23% scored a 5 (very good). They also indicated that the timing of this workshop (at the end of independent final teaching practice period) was essential for its success, and that it added something important to the guidance they had had before during the teacher education program. We conclude that indeed a more fundamental process, which we promoted during the workshop, is needed when encounters with students in school cause feelings of crisis in student teachers. As one student teacher said: "When I have a clear sight again, I have more courage to face the confrontation and I can feel my feet on the ground."

A reflection after the fact

In our Western world individuals who have reached the age of 18 or 21 are legally adults and thus responsible for their own actions. But this is not something that takes place automatically the moment you reach a certain age. It is a transitional process, one that may take many years, depending on the person, his or her activities, and the responsibilities he or she faces. The transition from the status of student to that of teacher, with all the accompanying responsibilities, is a very large step indeed. Student teachers realize that theirs is a pedagogical responsibility, and

one that cannot be shirked. During this phase beginning teachers have considerable doubts about their own capacities. Some examples:

> *In the negative experience that I had in mind for this session, I was obsessed with the need for clarity. What were the limits I wanted to accept, and within which the students would feel comfortable? I ignored disturbances and failed to deal with troublemakers because I wanted to finish a test. The result was loss of interest in the class, run-of-the-mill teaching, and students who were just 'sitting it out' (i.e., saved by the bell).*

> *Via the question of how I can be myself in class, I started thinking about whether I really belong in the classroom. My uncertainty about that last point makes it more difficult to answer the first question.*

Throughout a lifetime - even in the very moment of crisis - it is possible to retain the trust that this, too, will come to an end and that it is one of those experiences that are necessary in order to give meaning to your life. The majority of young people are not yet receptive to these words of wisdom. Quite simply, it is a difficult and trying period, one which requires guidance if beginning teacher are to get through it, perhaps not unscathed, but enriched by a deeper realization of their own identity. This learning process "represents the highest level of teacher development" (Diamond, 1991), because it involves a fundamental change of perspective (Mezirow, 1981).

Needless to say that we, as teacher educators, learned a lot from this workshop. First of all, it brought us into deeper contact with our own ideals, which have a bearing on promoting core qualities, both in teachers and students. We were also confronted with our own fears, not the least caused by negative reactions from some colleague faculty when they heard about our plans. This revealed that working with student teachers on deeper levels appears to be often associated with therapy, which for us is something completely different from what we did in the workshop. Most of all, the workshop almost forced us to show our own genuine inner selves to student teachers, especially in those moments were these students were confronted with parts of themselves they had long tried to avoid being aware of. In trying to stay close to these students in such moments, we as teacher educators were confronted with the question "do we meet our students or ourselves?"

References
Allender, J. S. (2001). *Teacher Self, the practice of humanistic education.* Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield.
Beijaard, D. (1995). Teachers' prior experiences and actual perceptions of professional identity. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 1*(2), 281-294.
Bullough, R. V. (1997). Practicing theory and theorizing practice in teacher education. In: J. Loughran & T. Russell (Eds.), *Purpose, passion and pedagogy in teacher education* (pp. 13-31). London/Washington D.C.: Falmer Press.
Calderhead, J. (1989). Reflective teaching and teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education 5,* p. 43-51.
Diamond, P.C.T. (1991). *Teacher education as transformation. A psychological perspective.* Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
Fenstermacher, G. D. (1994). The knower and the known: the nature of knowledge in research on teaching. *Review of Research in Education 20*, p. 3-56.
Jung, C.G. (1964). *The development of personality.* New York: Bollingen Foundation.

Kelchtermans, G. & Vandenberghe, R. (1994). Teachers' professional development: A biographical perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 26*, 45-62.

Klaassen, C. (2002). Teacher pedagogical competence and sensibility. *Teaching and Teacher Education 18*(2), 151-158.

Korthagen, F.A.J., Kessels, J., Koster, B., Lagerwerf, B. & Wubbels, T. (2001) *Linking practice and theory: The pedagogy of realistic teacher education.* Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Maslow, A.H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being (2nd ed.)* Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand.

Mezirow, J. (1981). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Nias, J. (1989a). Teaching at the self. In M.L. Holly & C.S. McLoughlin (Eds.), *Perspective on teacher professional development* (pp. 155-171). London: The Falmer Press.

Nias, J. (1989b). *Primary teachers talking: a study of teachers at work.* Londen/New York: Routledge.

Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pipes, R.B. & Davenport, D.S. (1990). *Introduction to psychotherapy.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Read, H. Fordham, M & Adler, G. (eds.) (1996). *The collected works of C.G. Jung.* Londen: Routledge.

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Tickle, L. (1999). Teacher self-appraisal and appraisal of self. In R. P. Lipka & T. M. Brinthaupt (Eds.), *The role of self in teacher development* (pp. 121-141). Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.

Zeichner, K. M., & Gore, J. M. (1990). Teacher socialization. In W. R. Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 329-348). New York: Macmillan.