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PRACTICE, THEORY, AND PERSON IN LIFE-LONG PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

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Introduction

Looking back to the time when the first ISATT conference took place, major changes have taken place in the theoretical frameworks and concepts guiding our thinking on teaching and teacher education. In this chapter, I discuss some of these changes, and their relations to each other. First, I focus on different models for teacher education, and more specifically, on a description of the tenets of the *realistic model.* Next, I explain the shift in teacher education towards a more realistic approach by relating it to new views of the intrapersonal sources of teacher behaviour including the non-rational and unconscious parts of a teacher's functioning. These new insights clarify why reflection is so important for teachers, and lead on to a specific view of what aspects are important in promoting reflection, and help us develop a different view on the role of theory in teacher education. Finally, I broaden my holistic view on teachers and teaching, and introduce a model of levels of reflection that helps to integrate into teaching the professional and the personal. I recommend attention to *core reflection,* e.g. reflection that includes the levels of personal identity and mission.

An analogy for teacher education

In order to sharpen our thinking on the issue of pedagogy in teacher education, let us consider an analogy.

The Netherlands has a few rivers that are economically important. For example, using the river Rhine much cargo from Germany is brought to Rotterdam, a European mainport. Navigating a ship on these rivers is often difficult and dangerous. There are many turns, unexpected streams, and the rivers are usually crowded with both commercial and recreational traffic. Hence, the people navigating these ships need to be competent. Suppose we wish to develop an effective education for these skippers. How would we do this?

One approach could be to bring them into a building with a sign saying: "Institute for Skipper Education". Within this building, experts would lecture on topics such as steering a ship, engine techniques, river traffic rules, and of course also on more theoretical issues: some physics related to water and the characteristics of streams. Novice skippers would have to study the Skippers Handbook, with several chapters on these issues. After one year, they would have to pass an examination testing them on whether they have acquired the necessary knowledge, and after passing the exam, we would say: "Congratulations!" We would then send the new skippers to their ships and say to them: "Now apply all this knowledge to practice! Good luck!" Later, we would offer them some inservice courses on anchoring and navigating at night, or in fog.

This approach is the *theory into practice approach*, also referred to as the *deductive approach,* since the content is directly deducted from the available scientific knowledge. We have to be aware that the deductive approach is not so much characterised by lecturing, but that its basic feature is that the educator decides what it is that is important to learn, on the basis of the available body of knowledge. This is characteristic of the traditional approach to

teacher education. Nowadays, many people are starting to have doubts about such an approach. We no longer believe in the possibility of a direct transfer of knowledge, and not only in teacher education. In all kinds of education, all over the world, the view of education depicted in figure 1 is seriously questioned. Somehow, something seems to be wrong if we still follow this approach in teacher education, where one would expect good examples of effective teaching to be shown.
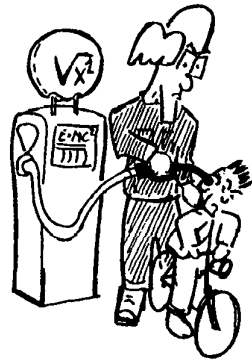

Figure 1: Knowledge transmission in education. (Drawings: Jan van Tartwijk, source: Wubbels, 1992)

Continuing the analogy, a second approach could be like this: we put the novice skipper on board a ship. The educators, as experienced experts, offer a bit of advice and some tips (e.g. "stay away from the river banks!") and then say: "Go! And call us if you meet any problems." Some people in the field think that this is inadequate, and may advise an approach with the student first joining an experienced skipper, to observe how it is done. In either case, the approach is characterised as being *practice-based,* although we can also label it the trial-and-error approach.

I believe that in both approaches discussed so far, we ourselves, as teacher educators, *create* the gap between theory and practice. In the deductive approach, we do so by drawing too strongly on theory. In the practice-based approach we do so by giving practice too prominent a place. In both approaches, what Smith (2003, p. 53) sees as educators' basic challenge, namely to *link* theory and practice, is not adequately dealt with.

This brings us to a third approach. Let us start again with our analogy of skipper education. We could start by looking for a small river, not too crowded, but with sufficient challenges for the novice. Guided by an experienced skipper, the student can try to find his own way, with room for small experiments. Now and then, experts come on board to discuss questions and problems. In other words, the student's own *concerns* serve as the starting point of the educational process. At regular intervals, the student reflects on his/her experiences together with other novices. Thus, under the supervision of their educators, students invent, or rather reinvent the best approaches to navigating a ship through a river. After some time, the novices will steer a ship on their own, and once a week the student skippers will gather to share experiences, to find solutions to problems, and to hear insights from experts that are connected to their own experiences.

The realistic approach to teacher education
Characteristic of this third approach is a continuous commuting between practice and theory. In the case of teacher education, we call this the *realistic approach.* Its basic features are:

• working on the basis of real situations met with during teaching that have caused a concern in the student teacher;

• reflection by and interaction between the student teachers;

• guided reinvention;

• no Theory with capital T (a subject created by researchers), but theory with a small t (as a subject *to be created,* namely by the student teachers themselves; compare Freudenthal, 1978, p. 72).

The contrast between Theory (with a capital T) and theory (with a small t) deserves some additional explanation. It is related to a classic difference between what Aristotle named *episteme* and *phronesis*.

Episteme is characterised by the following features:

• it is aimed at knowledge about many situations;

• it uses general concepts;

• it is based on scientific research;

• it is *conceptual*: it helps us to understand many situations.

In contrast, *phronesis*

• is aimed at concrete action, in a specific situation;

• focuses the attention on specific aspects of the situation (certain "cues");

• is based on one's own experiences;

• is *perceptual*: it shapes our perception of specific situations.

For example, the notion that feelings are important in educational settings is a principle that can be elaborated into a theoretical framework about relations between feelings and behaviour. This would mean that we have *episteme* about feelings, ideally a scientific framework. For practitioners, however, it may be much more important to become more aware of their own and their pupils' feelings, while in the process of teaching. If they do develop such an awareness, and if this awareness starts to influence their behaviour, they have developed *phronesis.* Later in this chapter, I will further elaborate on this difference.

I can summarise the essence of the above discussion using the two dimensions along which we can see important changes take place in our thinking on teacher education. They are shown in figure 2. In teacher education all over the world, shifts are taking place from the top to the bottom of figure 2, and from the left to the right.

The first, vertical, dimension has to do with the question of who is in charge of the learning. As already mentioned, constructivism has influenced a shift from the top to the bottom. There is also another important reason for this change in emphasis. If we want to promote life-long learning in teachers, we must develop their *growth competence.* Hence, we will have to invest in the development of their ability to direct their own learning, to structure their own experiences, and to construct their own theories of practice.

The second dimension is the dimension of the individual versus the group. In education, we have discovered the importance, for both pupils and teachers, of co-operative learning and the co-creation of knowledge. Hence, if we want schools to become communities of practice, with teachers further developing their own expertise together, we will have to help them get used to forms of collaborative or co-operative learning during teacher education.
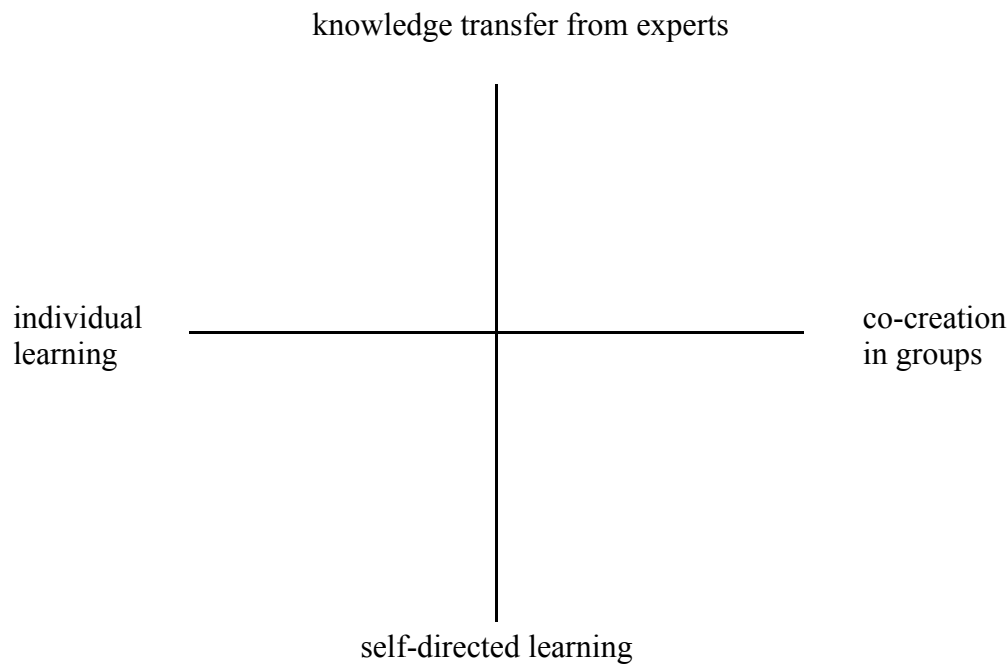
knowledge transfer from experts

individual
learning

co-creation
in groups

self-directed learning

Figure 2: Two dimensions of learning in teacher education

The essence of professional behaviour and professional learning
The shift from the top left to the bottom right in figure 2 is important for yet another reason, a reason grounded in new views on the sources of teacher behaviour. For a long time, especially around the time ISATT was founded, researchers believed that teacher behaviour was directed by teacher thinking, especially by the theories about teaching and learning in the minds of teachers (see, for example, Clark & Peterson, 1986). If you believe in this assumption, it seems to be logical to use the traditional, deductive approach. As explained above, in this approach, teachers are introduced to 'useful' educational theories, with the aim of having them apply these theories in their teaching. However, serious doubts about the assumption have been raised. Many researchers have shown that teachers make a large number of instant decisions during their teaching (see Eraut, 1995), so that at least part of these decisions have to be taken in an unconscious or semi-conscious way. Carter (1990, p. 27) states:

"One of the major conclusions from this research tradition [the teachers as decision-makers tradition] was that prior assumptions about teachers' decision-making were often inaccurate. (...) during interaction, teachers seldom made logical choices among several different alternatives. Rather, their actions seemed to be largely governed by rules and routines, with decision-making in a studied, deliberative sense taking a minor role in their interactive thinking."

According to Shavelson and Stern (1981), and Yinger (1986), such teacher routines are to a large degree based on habit formation. Talking about actions that we carry out spontaneously, Schön (1983, p. 54) states: "We are often unaware of having learned to do these things; we simply find ourselves doing them."
Dolk (1997) labelled the kind of teacher behaviour that occurs without much reflection and deliberate choice as *immediate teaching behaviour*. Korthagen & Lagerwerf (1996) consider such behaviour the result of an internal process, in which a dynamic conglomeration of needs, values, feelings, tacit knowledge, meanings, and behavioural inclinations all play a role. They call such a conglomeration a *Gestalt*. In their explanation of teacher behaviour, Korthagen and

Lagerwerf not only emphasise the often unconscious sources of teacher behaviour, but also the non-rational aspects mediating between perception and behaviour. Using the analogy of the left and the right side of the brain, one could say that much teacher behaviour is not so much guided by the analytic, rational and verbal functions of the left hemisphere, but rather by the tacit, holistic, a-rational, and integral modes of information processing characteristic for the right hemisphere.

We can summarise this part of our discussion with the aid of figure 3. Whereas 20 years ago, around the time of the first ISATT conference, the intrapersonal sources of teacher behaviour were sought in the grey upper left corner of figure 3, a broader view is now being proposed, also providing the three other cells with a place.
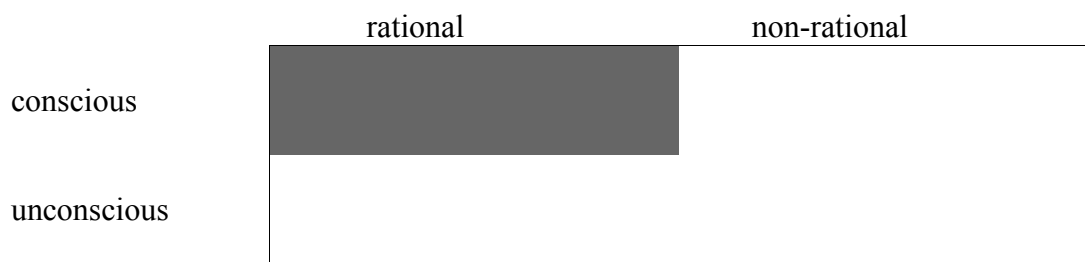

Figure 3: The intrapersonal sources of teacher behaviour and dimensions in reflection

The role of reflection, and how to promote it in teacher education

This broader view has direct consequences for the promotion of reflection in teacher education. Assuming, as has long been done, that teaching is mainly guided by conscious and rational sources, one will tend to stimulate teachers' reflection on their conscious and rational decision-making processes. However, if assuming that the intrapersonal sources of teacher behaviour are much broader, then the whole notion of teaching changes, and reflection on the role of less conscious and/or non-rational aspects in teaching will get more emphasis. This is why in our realistic teacher education program at Utrecht University, we stimulate student teacher reflection in educational situations on each of the dimensions of thinking, feeling, wanting, and acting, and on their interrelations (see for an elaboration, Korthagen et al, 2001, p. 121). This leads to a broadening of the concept of tacit or implicit knowledge, which can be located in the upper right cell of figure 3, and leads to concepts such as implicit emotion, implicit attitudes, etcetera, concepts that are currently receiving much interest from researchers in the field of psychology (Eich et al., 2000; Damasio, 1999).

It is remarkable that only a limited number of research studies have focused on the non-rational, and unconscious or semi-conscious sources of teacher behaviour. For example, in a literature search into the relations between the fulfilment of basic needs in student teachers and their interpersonal behaviour in the classroom, Evelein, Brekelmans, and Korthagen (2002) failed to find any studies into such relations. In fact, the role of needs in teachers' functioning seems to be almost completely overlooked by researchers.

Our discussion has some far-reaching consequences. If the role of reflection shifts from an exclusive focus on analytic thinking on the theories people are conscious of, towards becoming more aware of the non-rational sources of one's teaching behaviour, this also implies a shift from an emphasis on *episteme* towards more attention for *phronesis*. Hence, in the ALACT model, which we use to scaffold our student teachers' reflections (figure 4), the important third phase is called "awareness of essential aspects", and not, as is for example the case in Kolb's model (see Kolb & Fry, 1975), abstract conceptualisation. In this respect,

Kolb's model seems to fit better into the traditional view of teachers, namely as people who make conscious decisions based on general concepts and theories.
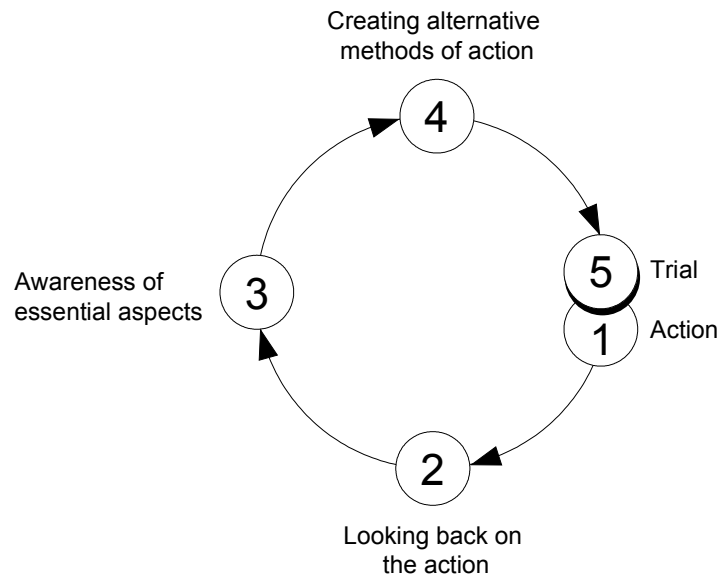
Creating alternative
methods of action

Awareness of
essential aspects

Trial

Action

Looking back on
the action

Figure 4: The ALACT model of reflection, named after the first letters of the five phases

In phase 2 of the model, student teachers reflect on their thinking, feeling, wanting, and doing, and on the same aspects in their pupils. The aim is to become more aware of how they are guided by certain cues during their teaching, including cues coming from inside the person, for example feelings of irritation or haste. This is exactly what is often difficult for beginning teachers: while teaching, they are often quite unaware of their feelings and needs, and of the feelings and needs of their pupils. Our approach to reflection also tries to promote a development in their awareness of such implicit aspects, since we believe that they often have a much higher impact on these student teachers' behaviours than the theories they have been exposed to in teacher education. Moreover, we consider the development of an awareness of feelings as a prerequisite to becoming an empathic teacher.

Our approach is concurrent with the model of learning Marton and Booth (1997) present. They, too, put a strong emphasis on the role of awareness in the functioning of practitioners, and claim that when the learner has learned something, he or she "has become capable of discerning aspects of the phenomenon other than those she had been capable of discerning before" (p. 142). In previous work, Marton et al. (1977, p. 23) referred to this kind of learning as "a change in the eyes through which we see the world". Marton and Booth (1997, p. 142) add that, through the changed awareness of the phenomenon, the relationship between the person and the phenomenon changes.

An important part of the reflection process is the transition from phase 2 to phase 3. Based on our assumption that problems in teaching are generally caused by discrepancies between a person's thinking, feeling, wanting and acting, and/or by discrepancies between such aspects and the same aspects in the pupils (see Korthagen et al, 2001, p. 121-122), we stimulate our students to explore such discrepancies. As Loughran stresses in his chapter in this book, one frequently occurring type of discrepancy is that between a person's beliefs and his or her behaviour: teachers often act contrary to what they believe is right. When they start to realise this when reflecting on particular situations, they will more easily become aware of the influence of the emotional and volitional sources of their actions.

Of course, a focus on the non-rational sources of our behaviour can sometimes make people feel awkward: often it feels much safer to stick to the more rational aspects of our functioning that we are already conscious of. Hence, our broader concept of reflection more or less forces people to go beyond the present boundaries of their *comfort zone*: the zone in which one feels familiar and safe. Indeed, one never knows what comes up if one delves more deeply into the reasons for one's behaviour. It is helpful to make this problem explicit, as well as the tendency to stick to the familiar. It makes teachers aware of the fact that genuine professional development includes risk-taking. It also makes them aware of the fact that every day they are asking their pupils to stretch their comfort zones.

We can summarise our view of reflection as follows:

1. It is beneficial if teachers are stimulated to reflect on their own classroom experiences on the basis of their personal concerns. This first principle is a direct consequence of choosing the realistic approach.

2. It is beneficial if reflection on the non-rational sources of behaviour is included. The reasons for this principle have been discussed above.

3. It is beneficial if this reflection follows a systematic structure, and if this structure is made explicit. Making the ALACT model and the cognitive, emotional, volitional, and behavioural dimensions explicit as a guideline for systematic reflection, appears to help student teachers to go beyond superficial ways of analysing problems and solutions. It can become the cornerstone of life-long professional learning.

4. It is beneficial if this structure is introduced gradually. An important tenet of the realistic approach is that effective professional learning is based on personal experience of concrete practical situations. This idea is also applicable to learning how to reflect effectively: without sufficient teaching experiences, and experiences with reflection on these experiences, presenting student teachers with a reflection model early on in the teacher education program is often counterproductive. Although it seems attractive to use such a model right from the start of the curriculum, one runs the risk of following a deductive approach, which often only results in resistance from the students against the "r-word". Student teachers have to experience that any systematic structure for reflection that is offered to them adds something valuable to what they were already doing. For this reason, it is better to wait with the introduction of the ALACT model until there is an experiential basis, and even then, teacher educators should be careful not to offer too many guidelines for systematic reflection at the same time. (See for more details Korthagen et al, 2001, p. 211-213).

5. It is beneficial if meta-reflection is promoted. If student teachers reflect on their own ways of reflecting (meta-reflection), and compare their habitual ways of reflecting with the ALACT model, this may help them to become aware of ineffective tendencies, such as lingering too long in phase 2 (looking back), or jumping too quickly to solutions (phase 4). If they decide to try to improve their usual ways of reflecting, regular meta-reflection on these attempts can again support further learning.

6. It is beneficial if peer-assisted reflective learning is being promoted. Support from peers is often more effective than attempts by the teacher educator to promote students' reflection. If everyone involved in a teacher education program (the students, the teacher educators, and the mentor teachers) are familiar with the ALACT model, this offers them common ground to walk on. It raises professional learning to a higher level. Moreover, peer-assisted reflection prepares teachers for continuous professional learning with colleagues once they have become teachers, and thus counterbalances the highly individualistic and non-collaborative culture of teaching that Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) point to.

The professional and the personal
The above discussion has pointed towards a more holistic view of the teacher, a view in which the professional and the personal aspects of teaching are viewed from an integrated

perspective. It may be indicative of the development in the field of teaching and teacher education that all the keynote lectures during the 2003 ISATT conference, in one way or another stressed the relation between the professional and the personal in teaching. I believe this relation goes to the heart of teaching, and below I discuss how this can lead to a deepening of the concept of reflection.

At conferences for teachers and teacher educators, I often do the following experiment. I ask people to think back to a really good teacher from the time they themselves were pupils or students. Next, I ask them to name an essential characteristic of this teacher. Generally speaking, more than 90% of the answers are personal characteristics that are not specific to the teaching profession, such as care, sensitivity, humour, trust, courage, flexibility, openness, et cetera. Following Ofman (2000), I call these *core qualities*. As Tickle (1999, p. 123) states, it is remarkable that such qualities are seldom discussed in the literature on teaching and teacher education.

Indeed, in the professional literature, there is much more attention to professional competencies. If we wish to incorporate the more personal aspects of teaching into teachers' reflections, the following model (called "the onion"; see Korthagen, 2004) may be helpful (figure 5). It is an adaptation of what in the literature is often referred to as "Bateson's model", although Gregory Bateson never published such a model. It distinguishes between six levels of reflection, and demonstrates that an exclusive focus on competencies is too limited. Teachers can reflect on the environment (the first level), for example a specific class or pupil, their teaching behaviour (second level), or their competencies (third level). The reflection starts to deepen when underlying beliefs are also reflected on (fourth level), and relations with how one perceives one's own (professional or personal) identity (fifth level). Finally (on the sixth level), one can reflect on one's place in the world, one's personal mission as a teacher. This is a transpersonal level (sometimes referred to as the level of spirituality, see e.g. Dilts, 1990; Mayes, 2001), as it has to do with meanings that reach beyond the individual. It is the level that refers to the teacher's personal inspiration, to ideals, to the moral purposes of the teacher. On the deeper levels, people's core qualities emerge. For example, a mission to help pupils develop self-confidence will often be connected to core qualities such as sensitivity, empathy, and/or steadfastness.

It can be important for teachers to become aware of their core qualities in order to be able to use them more intentionally and systematically. It may be clear that this leads to a more person-oriented view of educating teachers than a competency-based approach, which is often based on standard lists of competencies.

The idea behind the onion model is that the levels are all interrelated, and that professional reflection is deepened by a search for these relations. Discrepancies between the levels (for example a tension between one's beliefs and one's behaviour, or a felt distance between one's mission and the environment one is working in) will cause problems. Stated more positively, reflection on these levels can help to foster *alignment* between the levels, which is experienced as inner harmony, and a sense of "flow" (a phenomenon described by Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Struggles on the level of behaviour or competencies, for example, obtain a different meaning when they are considered from the point of view of one's commitment to a long-term aim on the sixth, transpersonal level, and the development of personal core qualities needed for this long-term growth process. So again, we see that reflection that is framed within a person's life-long professional development can have a different colour in comparison with reflection that is focused on separate teaching situations.
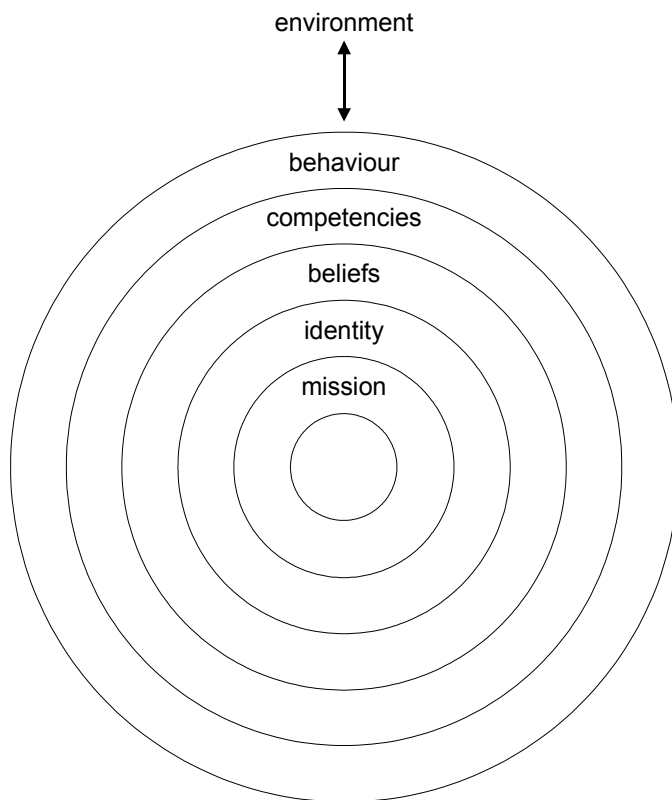
Figure 5: The onion: A model of levels in reflection

If the levels of identity and mission are included in the reflection, we speak of *core reflection,* because these levels lie nearer to the core of the person, and because this kind of reflection brings people into contact with their core qualities.

Just as we have seen a change in our professional field from a focus on the conscious and rational sources of teacher behaviour towards the other cells in figure 3, we can now also see another change taking place: whereas for quite a long time the attention of researchers was focused on the three or four outer levels of figure 5, and the focus of the promotion of reflection by teachers was generally in line with this, to date we see more publications about the levels of identity and mission, and a growing attention for the need for teacher reflection on these levels (for example Beijaard, 1995; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994).

Tickle (1999, p. 136) states that "the teacher as a person is the core by which education itself takes place", and both researchers and teacher educators increasingly acknowledge this. Palmer (1998, p. 10) says: "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher". It is my view that such insights should change traditional practices in teacher education, and that more attention for the inner levels of the onion model is a prerequisite for a balanced integration of the personal and the professional in teaching.

One example may further support this view. One of my colleagues, Anke Tigchelaar, is carrying out research into the development of second-career teachers. One of the striking results of her research is that people who change careers and go into teaching often do this on the basis of a deepened understanding of their personal identity, or a strong commitment to some personal goal, but that the teacher educators responsible for their education seldom ask questions about these personal aspects, or use them as a springboard for professional development as a teacher. In other words, the levels of identity and mission are often simply ignored, even in cases where they are of high personal importance to the student.

On the basis of my work with inservice teachers, I am inclined to believe that many go into teaching because of some deeply felt inner mission, but that the personal goals and commitments of a large number of them are frustrated by institutional pressures, and not in the least through lack of support from school leaders - and even close colleagues - for the translation of inner missions into concrete behaviours in specific environments. As one of my inservice teachers said:

"Everyone who decides to work with people must have ideals. Everyone has that 'level' inside, but at a certain moment you can decide to close the hatch."

Teacher shortages have received a great deal of attention, and in many countries teacher educators are investing in specific curricula in order to attract more people into teaching. Perhaps it is no less important to support those already teaching in implementing their ideals, for research has shown that the loss of ideals, and lack of support in their realisation, have a great impact on the development of burnout and decisions to leave the profession. As Palmer (1998) says, finding answers to the question "What's the sense of it all?" is not a luxury, but a necessity if teachers are to continue to put their hearts and souls into their work.
Together with Angelo Vasalos, I have developed professional development courses for teacher educators and mentor teachers to support their ability to promote core reflection in teachers (Korthagen & Vasalos, in press). It requires specific supervisory competencies, but most of all the willingness to reflect oneself on the deeper levels of the onion and to extend one's comfort zone.

Pupils, teachers, and teacher educators
In this chapter, three main threads can be distinguished.
The first thread is the idea of three different approaches to teacher education: the traditional deductive model, aiming at the translation of theory into practice; the practice-based approach; and the realistic approach, which tries to integrate theory and practice by building on student teachers' own teaching experiences and their concerns. The latter is, in my view, most concurrent with recent constructivist views of pupil learning. If we want pupils in schools to trust their ability to construct their own knowledge, to reflect on their own views of the world, and to develop their personal identity and mission in life, I believe teacher educators have to model this by stressing the same things in our student teachers' learning. This generally requires a change in the teacher educators' role. Working within a realistic approach requires the ability to build on student teachers' concerns, to help individual students go through the phases of reflection, to organise reflective interactions between student teachers, to teach student teachers how they can systematically develop themselves, to look at human development holistically, and so on. Based on my work in many institutions of teacher education, I conclude that this requires an intensive investment in the professional development of teacher educators, something that is at present often overlooked.
A second thread in the chapter was the role of reflection in teacher learning. Learning from experiences based on systematic reflection is a fundamental characteristic of the realistic approach, contributing to the capacity for life-long learning. I have emphasised that systematic and effective reflection is something to be learned: individuals can develop their way of reflecting, thus enhancing the quality of their learning from experiences. The essence of reflection is bringing the unconscious aspects of teaching into conscious awareness, so that people become more sensitive to important aspects of educational situations. I called this the development of *phronesis*.
This has to do with the third thread running through my chapter: the personal aspect of learning. Pupils, student teachers, and teacher educators are human beings, with their specific individual fears, hopes, needs, values, missions. These not only influence their behaviour and

their learning, but will often be the very source of it. I have argued that for a long time we may have focused too exclusively on the rational and conscious sources of behaviour, thus overlooking the human side.

My personal mission has to do with caring for the children in the schools. Through the years, it has become clear to me how important it is to develop their core qualities, to help them develop a positive sense of identity and mission. Again, we will have to model this in our work with student teachers, and thus in our own reflections as teacher educators. That is why I have asked for attention to core reflection, e.g. reflection focused on all the levels of the onion model, and have emphasised the importance of daring to step out of the expert role, and make ourselves vulnerable. For only when people are willing to extend their comfort zones, will genuine change take place. The tensions in today's world show how crucial this may be. Teacher educators could take the lead in showing the importance of an awareness of our own identities as teachers, and our personal missions, and of course, how these are related to our actual professional behaviour. For, as Hamachek (1999, p. 209) puts it: "Consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously, we teach who we are."

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