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“Pupils should have respect for you, although I have no idea how to achieve this?”: The ideals and experiences shaping a teacher’s professional identity

Abstract

The aim of the study was to understand the development of professional identity of prospective teachers, their ideals and experiences during interactions with their surrounding learning environment, including university studies and pedagogical placement during their 5-year studies. We also aimed at understanding how students with different motivational pathways to teacher education may be supported to explore teaching as a possible career choice. The findings reported in this article emerged primarily from interviews with 13 student teachers at the end of their teacher education program. Survey responses collected during earlier stages of the study were utilised to provide data about the student teachers’ professional development prior to the point of the interviews. The findings of the study point to various concerns and dilemmas, which in turn suggest that student teachers take different identity development routes. The study identified four possible “identity routes” to becoming a teacher. The implications of different identity routes on teacher education are discussed.

Key words: Teacher education, beliefs, teacher ideals, teacher identity, professional identity

Introduction

Teacher education has been criticised for not sufficiently supporting the development of novice teachers’ professional identity and the transition from the role of a student teacher to that of a practicing teacher (Smagorinsky et al., 2004; Freese, 2006). The way in which teachers perceive their professional identity influences their professional efficacy and development. Professional identity also influences teachers’ ability to cope with changes in their work and their ability to implement innovative approaches (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000). Therefore, it is not sufficient to focus on what prospective teachers do or should do. Instead, it is necessary to understand how prospective teachers perceive themselves professionally. The process of

envisioning oneself as a professional is an important stage in developing as a teacher (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007). Questions such as “Who am I as a teacher?” “Who do I want to be?” and “What is the ideal that I seek to achieve?” are essential in both shaping one’s teacher identity and in one’s professional development (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

The development of a teacher’s professional identity has been described as a continuous and dynamic process of making sense of one’s own values and experiences influenced by personal, social and cognitive factors (Flores & Day, 2006). In this study, teacher professional identity is viewed as a dynamic understanding of oneself and one’s profession, which is construed in context, and influenced by beliefs and experiences. Furlong (2013), citing Britzman (1991, 8), argues that, “Learning to teach – like teaching itself – is always a process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny of what one is doing, and who one can become.” This process is mediated by various aspects of identity, namely, N-, I-, D- and A-identity (cf. Gee, 2000). There are aspects of identity over which one has practically no control (e.g. being a twin), but which can nevertheless develop as characteristics of identity. There are also aspects of identity determined by institutions (e.g. teacher at school X). The position one holds is neither “given” by nature, nor achievable entirely by the individual, but is regulated by laws, rules, traditions and principles. Furthermore, some aspects of identity come into being in relationships and interactions with others (e.g. charisma). These aspects are neither innate nor upheld or created by institutions, but materialize in discourses and dialogues with other people. Last, identity can be constructed through participation, membership and sharing in an affinity group (e.g. fan of a sports team), which is neither innate nor is its’ “achievement” regulated by institutions (Gee, 2000).

The current study focuses on teachers’ perceptions, which can be defined as representations of their understandings of their own professional identity (Beijaard et al, 2000). The understanding of own professional identity could include elements of identity as construed within institutional and regulatory frameworks and conditions (I-identity), in dialogue with others (D-identity), and through membership in the broader community of other professionals, i.e. teachers (A-identity) (Gee, 2000). The representations include the understanding of oneself as a representative of a subject or subjects; the understanding of oneself as someone engaging in personal professional relationships with students; and the conception of the teacher’s role (Beijaard, 1995). Accordingly, “teachers derive their professional identity from (mostly combination of) the ways they see themselves as subject matter experts, pedagogical experts, and didactical experts” (Beijaard et al., 2000, 751). The relationship with one’s subject, relationships with students, and the relationship with teaching the subject (compare with

Beijaard and colleagues' subject expert, pedagogical expert, and didactics expert dimensions of identity) have also been emphasised by Mensah (2012) in addition to positionalities, i.e. social markers, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and age. Together these can reveal discourses on professional identity among preservice teacher identities. The social nature of identity implies that a teacher's professional identity is influenced by the interplay between the individual and their social environment. Identity is construed in processes of competence, performance and recognition (Carlone & Johnson, 2007). Personal biography, teacher education and experience gained through pedagogical placement play an important role in this process (Flores & Day, 2006). While different authors have conceptualised identity through different components or perspectives, they all appear to agree on identity construction as a complex, multidimensional process. In this study, we have relied particularly on the definition of teacher professional identity as representations of oneself as subject matter and didactics expert (compare with Carlone's and Johnson's, 2007, notions of competence and performance), and as socially interacting professional (cf. Beijaard, 1995; Beijaard et al. 2000).

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of *becoming* a teacher, as viewed by graduating student teachers. While there is a literature base on teacher identity development, we were interested in potentially differing identity processes of student teachers who study in different programs in Estonia, namely a five-year integrated teacher education program which students generally enter with an intention to become teachers, and in a so called 3+2 program. In the 3+2 program students first study a subject and develop an identity as representatives of their specific field, and only then is the teacher identity developed, sometimes perhaps as an "add on" to the subject specialist identity. There is some evidence (Schepens, Aelterman & Vlerick, 2009) that the teacher identities of the students graduating from different teacher education programs differ from each other. By looking into a group of graduating student teachers reflecting back on their experiences we can gain an increased understanding of how these individuals construct their teacher identity and what the crucial points of development are that could be more effectively harnessed to support the development of teacher identity especially among subject teachers studying in a 3+2 curriculum.

Furthermore, there are great expectations that teacher education will solve the problem of shrinking numbers of teachers. Estonia, like many other countries, is grappling with the problem that students who have completed a Bachelor's degree do not see teacher education as an attractive option (Teachers Matter, 2005). Through this study, we also aimed at understanding how students with different motivational pathways to teacher education may be supported to explore teaching as a possible career choice. With increased understanding of the

opportunities to identify and work with prospective teacher education students during their bachelor's studies, prior to entering teacher education, it may be possible to develop the recruitment of prospective students to teacher education.

Prospective reflection and ideals in the development of professional identity

Based on prior research on teacher identity, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) outline three important aspects that characterise a teacher's professional identity. These are: a) *multiplicity*, b) *discontinuity*, and c) *social nature*. Multiplicity implies that a teacher's professional identity is composed of many sub-identities, for instance subject matter expert, pedagogical expert, and didactical expert (Beijaard et al., 2000). Discontinuity implies that the development of a teacher's professional identity is a constantly changing process of interpreting and reinterpreting one's experience (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). In this process, teachers seek answers to the questions "Who am I?" and "Who do I want to become?" Professional identity can also be approached through what kind of teacher one does not want to become. Mensah (2011) has used drawings as a tool to address preservice teachers' ideal identity. The study showed that the student teachers used negative, traditional and student-centred images to describe the kind of teacher they did not wish to be. Simultaneously, they used positive and non-traditional images to describe the kind of teacher they would like to be.

The development of professional identity involves confrontation and conformation between conflicting perspectives, expectations and roles (Beijaard et al., 2004). A constant dialogue between the ideal and the experienced reality helps individuals to ascertain their personal goals and monitor their growth and practice as professionals (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010). Therefore, on the one hand, reflection as a process of becoming aware of one's competence, beliefs, attitudes and values, gives student teachers an increased awareness of self, while on the other hand helps them take responsibility for personal growth. However, the majority of reflection taking place within teacher education and during the introductory placement is retrospective rather than prospective. Retrospective reflection recalls memories, while anticipatory or prospective reflection entails visions and hopes and is focused on future possibilities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010). Therefore, it is also important to guide student teachers in their thinking to consider the future and reflect on what kind of teachers they want to be. Guidance on thinking about what kind of teachers they would like to be supports student teachers in becoming aware of aspects of their professional identity that have not been realised yet, but which may be aspired to (De Ruyter & Conroy, 2002; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

The reflection process helps to increase awareness of ideals by asking questions such as: “What do you strive to achieve?” and “What is your concept of an ideal teacher?” Ideals play an important role in an individual’s development because these establish targets to strive for, help set goals and make effort meaningful. Ideals reflect what is valued. However, ideals can also be demoralising if they are experienced as being impossible to attain (De Ruyter & Conroy, 2002). Role models and significant others, such as teachers from one’s own school years, visions, personal qualities and role expectations influence the development of ideals (De Ruyter & Conroy, 2002; Korthagen, 2004; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Furlong, 2013). Research has shown that professional ideals are necessary constituents of the personal identity of professionals, and provide a point of reference for student and novice teachers to calibrate their goals and actions:

“For preservice teachers, image of ideal teacher represents a model to relate to for it provides criteria to aspire to, aim for and act in accordance with. In addition, it represents a measure of evaluation of a teacher’s practical activity—both personal and professional”. (Arnon & Reichel, 2007, 461)

Ideals are pursued collectively as these are constituents of a group professional identity. Simultaneously the ideals also need to be recognised by individual professionals in order for them to be endorsed at the group level. As representing highly desirable values, ideals have strong normative and motivating power for the individual, but they may also create tensions if they seem unreachable in light of an individuals’ identity:

“Professionals do not simply adopt the professional ideals, but make them their own by selecting which of them they think are most important and by interpreting them in a personal way” (Kole & De Ruyter, 2009, 142).

A study on the development of teacher’s professional identity showed that towards the end of their studies (fourth and fifth year) student teachers revisited their motives for becoming a teacher and in doing so, they encountered contradictions between their ideals, norms and reality (Anspal, Eisenschmidt & Löfström, 2011). Tensions in this domain could cause anger, fear, resignation and lack of motivation (Lauriala & Kukkonen, 2005). Teacher ideals could also clash with conceptions of one’s personal characteristics, in which case the student needs to consolidate the tension for instance by compensating for what they experience to be their shortcomings with supportive resources in their environment (Anspal et al., in press). Research shows that the most difficult stage in a teaching career is when new teachers begin teaching. Difficulties emerge if the identities prospective teachers have

developed during teacher education are not coherent with the reality they face in school. Maintaining ideals and coping with daily realities are likely to cause contradictions and challenges for new teachers (Arnon & Reichel, 2007). Practice teaching during teacher education has been shown to be a vital element in developing teacher identity (Lamote & Engels, 2010). One reason for this could be that ideals are put to the test if they conflict with reality and ideals are called into question (cf. Anspal et al., in press).

Teacher education programs support professional identity development in different ways. Simultaneously, teacher professional identity is influenced also by prior experiences, and therefore we anticipate that even within the same institutional context, students will take a variety of “identity routes”. In this study we sought to combine ideals and influences on teacher professional identity in light of five years of university studies in a context struggling to make teacher education an attractive study and career option. We posed the following research questions:

1. How are perceptions of the ideal teacher reflected in student teachers’ emerging professional identity?
2. What are the most significant influences on student teachers’ perceptions of teaching and themselves as teachers during teacher education?
3. What teacher identity formation processes do student teachers display as a result of teacher education?

Methods

Research design

The findings reported in this article emerged primarily from interviews at the end of a five-year longitudinal study. Survey responses collected during earlier stages of the study (Table 1) were utilised in order to add developmental information from earlier phases of study to the participants’ narrations.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Data collection

The main method of data collection was interview (see Appendix 1). Interview items regarding teacher ideals, ideal self as teacher, and the perceived distance between the ideal and current situation provided information about the student teachers' perceptions of the ideal teacher. After having described their ideals, the participants were asked to evaluate how far they felt they were from their ideal on a 10-point scale and how they had planned to reach their ideal. The interviews contained also a retrospective component in which the interviewees were asked to look back at their studies, concentrating on the experiences that had influenced their understandings of teaching and the teacher's professional role. Metaphors of the teacher's role written in the first, third and fifth-year surveys were used as memory enhancers in the interviews. The metaphors helped the interviewees to recall and reflect on their understandings across the years, to grasp and verbalise changes in their understanding (cf. Leavy, McSorley & Bote, 2007; Alger, 2009; Pinnegar et al., 2011). Interviews, conducted by the first author, lasted approximately 35 minutes, and were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Survey data were collected from the participants during their first, third and fifth study year- It was used for shedding additional light on the participants' developmental trajectories. and for interpreting changes in these trajectories. Thus, the survey data shed light on the interview narrations- It constituted 1) scales for reasons for selecting teacher education, 2) one item on the likelihood of entering teacher education or the teaching profession, and 3) one item on the clarity of motives for their choice of study (cf. Author, et al., 2010; Authors, 2013):

1) The scale on *reasons for selecting teacher education and the teaching profession* comprised thirteen items reflecting intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic motives (cf. Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000) rated on a scale from *not at all important* (1) to *very important* (5). The four types of motives measured by the scale were pedagogical interest with altruistic motives, security-seeking with extrinsic motives, a wish to function as a change agent with intrinsic motives, and social reasons with mostly extrinsic motives.

2) The item on *likelihood of entering teacher education or the teaching profession* read: "What is the likelihood of you continuing your studies within the teacher education curriculum after you have completed the bachelor's studies/master's program?" It utilised a four-point scale with responses ranging from *unlikely* (1) to *very likely* (4).

3) The item on the *clarity of reasons and motives for choosing one's curriculum* read: "When you started studying at the university, how clear were the reasons and motives for you to start

studies within this particular curriculum?” It utilised a four-point scale with responses ranging from *very vague* (1) to *very clear* (4) reasons and motives.

Participants

The participants were recruited among students who had responded to the survey in their first, third and fifth year of study. Of the potential research participants, thirteen students were purposefully sampled in an interview based on the following criteria: The interview sample was to include students from both class-teacher (integrated program) and subject-teacher (3+2 year program) education; preferably both men and women; to include both clear and less clear self-reported motives for choosing teacher education; and include both high and low self-reported likelihood of entering teacher education/the teaching profession. This selection procedure resulted in five class-teachers and eight subject-teachers. Twelve of them were women. Seven had started working as teachers already during their studies and had between 0.5 and 2 years of teaching experience upon graduation. Although all the interviewees were about to graduate from Master's level studies in teacher education, not all of them had been certain about their choice at the start of their university studies. Based on the survey data collected in the first, third and fifth year of study we had the following background information about the participants: Four students who started studies under the class-teacher's curriculum were "certain" about their career choice as a teacher and one considered it "probable". Five of the subject-teachers thought that they would continue teacher education studies after completion of their Bachelor's degree; one considered it "likely" and two students were of the opinion that they would "most certainly not" make that choice. Based on the reasons for choosing teacher education studies, as described by the interviewees during 3 years of Bachelor level studies, the intrinsic motivation still prevailed (they liked to teach, liked the subject, were certain about this choice from the beginning). However, some teacher education undergraduates (4 students) admitted having made a random choice. Altruistic motivators (desire to make things better, change the world, possibility to influence young people's lives positively) and external motivators (secure a state job appointment, easy and convenient choice) as reasons for choosing teacher education studies were mentioned by 3-4 students in the Bachelor level surveys. Thus, the participants were future teachers with diverse motivations (Appendix 2). Exerpts from the interviews used in the article are equipped with a reference number which refers to the number of the interviewee in Appendix 2- The abbreviation CT refers to class teacher and ST to subject teacher.

Data analysis

The interview transcripts were entered in NVivo (Version 10) qualitative data software. The data were then analysed applying inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a first step, the interview data were analysed question-by-question by the first author, identifying emerging themes (open coding), and discussed together with the second author as a means to establish reliability of interpretations. Drawing on all interview questions, we identified four main themes pertaining to identity that the participants expressed in their responses. For example, in answering the questions “*Do you have a vision of the kind of teacher you would like to be? Could you give a description of the vision?*” half of the respondents described personal attributes of their ideal teacher (e.g. positive, kind, demanding, flexible, active, understanding, energetic, up beat). We thus identified personal characteristics and qualities as an essential element of teacher identity. We grouped these attributes together and labelled them thematically as “Personal qualities of the teacher”. Similarly, thematic entities, such as the learner-centred teacher, teacher as the moderator, teacher as the creator of a positive classroom climate and teacher expanding the teaching process outside of the classroom, were labelled “Teacher as designer of a positive learner-centred classroom”. The themes were, on the one hand elaborated (i.e. assigning accurate descriptors to themes), and on the other hand, narrowed down (i.e. merging similar themes) in an iterative process to establish reliable themes. Examples to illustrate categories were searched for in the data set. In this article, data excerpts to illustrate the results are presented in italics.

Ethical issues

The first author teaches subject student teachers in their first year. By the time of the interviews, the participating subject student teachers were at the end of their second year and no grading or other responsibilities that might influence participation were present. There were no relationships between the interviewees and the second author. Likewise, there were no relationships between the authors and participants in the class teacher program. Participation in the research was voluntary at all stages during the data collection. No incentives were used. Identifying information about the participants’ have not been disclosed.

Results

Teacher ideals in teacher identity development

Ideals

All participants had a vision of themselves as an ideal teacher marking ideals as an indispensable dimension of teacher identity development. Four main themes related to teacher ideals were identified: 1) the personal qualities of teacher, 2) the teacher as a designer of a positive learner-centred classroom environment, 3) the subject and teaching the subject, and 4) classroom management.

In their descriptions of an ideal teacher, future *class-teachers* participating in the study emphasised in general different aspects compared to the future *subject-teachers*. The teaching subject played an important role in the subject student teachers' identity. In describing their teacher ideals. These students prioritised subject-related aspects, i.e. an ideal subject teacher *knows how to make the subject interesting for pupils; is competent in the field; makes pupils enjoy the subject; can make pupils love [the subject]; teaches pupils to value and analyse [the subject]; is the subject patriot*. Also important in the ideal teacher descriptions were the teacher's instructional skills: *teacher as instructor – provides the foundation, but pupils think on their own; makes pupils communicate with each other; group leader; supports the development of thinking and analytical skills; helps pupils find knowledge individually; makes pupils communicate, create and achieve on their own*.

The prospective subject-teachers participating in the study primarily emphasised the teacher's skills and classroom management and being respected by the pupils. The key characteristics in their ideal teacher descriptions were *reverence* and *respect*. Their descriptions of the ideal teacher emphasised discipline, order and self-assurance. These students were concerned about how to achieve these goals, i.e. to find a *balance between order and freedom* and being *strict and kind, friendly and respected* at the same time. They felt in general that the teacher should demonstrate personal interest and respect towards each individual pupil while finding it important to maintain a distance between themselves and their pupils. Finding such balance was a characteristic of their ideals.

Class-teachers' descriptions of the ideal teacher emphasised not so much the skill of making a specific subject interesting for pupils, but rather the competence of making the entire learning process learner-centred. This is likely the result of class teachers having to teach a number of various subjects rather than concentrating on a specific subject in which they have a strong background. All class-teachers emphasised the importance of lesson planning and the ability to be flexible in adjusting learning processes according to the students' needs. According to their views, the ideal teacher makes lessons so exciting that *the pupils are observing with awe and you will not see any bored faces; the teacher provides many attractive assignments*

and when you see that everything does not go as planned, then you'll have lots of ideas up your sleeve about what to change and what to do, and provides out-of-classroom learning experiences, such as field trips and excursions to museums. The participants thought that ideal class teachers know their pupils and make sure they feel safe. The class-teacher ideal was described through personal qualities. The ideal class teacher was described as someone who is *energetic, happy, precise, flexible and active*. Prospective class-teachers desired to serve as *role models for pupils*. In contrast to subject-teachers, only one of the class teachers' ideal descriptions reflected the aspects of maintaining discipline or earning respect. While both subject and class-teachers considered it important to make the subject interesting for pupils, only subject-teachers' ideal descriptions reflected mastering the subject as an important aspect of an ideal teacher. It is noteworthy that in the Bachelor level surveys (in years 1 and 3), prospective subject-teachers typically highlighted the subject as one of the most important factors influencing their desire to become a teacher. Thus, the teaching subject appeared to play a more central role in subject teacher than class teacher identity development.

The ideals of student teachers with work experience differed from the ideals of the student teachers without work experience. Student teachers with work experience firstly emphasised the importance of personal qualities and secondly, the learner in their descriptions of an ideal teacher. The inexperienced future teachers were more focused on how a teacher manages to make the subject interesting and maintains discipline in the classroom. Overall, ideal descriptions tended to focus on the pupils and the teacher whereas the school context was not acknowledged. Only two student teachers mentioned in their ideal teacher descriptions expectations related collegial relationships and the school as an organisation. It is noteworthy that only one of the students, a practicing class-teacher, described an ideal teacher as someone who reflects on his or her teaching:

"Self-analysis is definitely important; certainly one cannot do it all the time, but in the long run, at least per term, one should think back at least a little". CT 4

In forming their ideals, the student teachers drew on teacher characteristics, role models, and envisioned student perceptions. They mentioned their own former teachers as ideal role models:

"... that's easy for me because I'm thinking about a teacher I'd like to take after...the kind of teacher who can communicate freely with pupils and ensure open and friendly and straightforward communication in the classroom, but the pupils still hold you in high regard and feel embarrassed when they have left things at home". ST 9

Gap between ideals and the perceived current situation

The participants' evaluations of the gap between their current and ideal self, varied from 4 to 8 on a 10-point scale. Two student teachers who did not have earlier work experience perceived themselves to be closest to their teacher ideal. They assessed themselves with a score of 7 or 8/10. Other students evaluated their distance from their ideal self as 4 to 6/10. In contrast to students who had no prior teaching experience, students who had teaching experience provided a perhaps more realistic and a more profound self-analysis in comparing their current self with their ideal self. They were able to distinguish between different sub-skills (e.g. cognitive, instructional and interpersonal skills) and also provided different scores for different sub-skills demonstrating a more fine-grained analysis of their competences.

While the prospective teachers had a clear vision of their ideal self as a teacher, they may not have been certain of how to attain that ideal. The quotation in the title of this article captures these sentiments: *"Pupils should have respect for you, although I have no idea how to achieve this"* ST 9. Ten prospective teachers maintained that in order to attain their ideal, they needed more work experience. Only 3 teachers highlighted specific issues that they felt they needed to address based on self-reflection, namely improving their knowledge of teaching techniques or of the subject and being persistent as well as adopting a systematic approach to establishing classroom rules and solving problems. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents mentioned reflection, work analysis or feedback from pupils and peers as vehicles for professional development.

Experience of teaching is indeed important, but without reflection it will not fully help teachers in the understanding and development of their work and themselves as teachers. Learning from experience is facilitated through expressing the experience in words, sharing and analysing and relating experiences to theoretical knowledge. Prospective teachers may feel that practical experience is vital in providing "real life" experience compared to the relatively protected professional placement environment, which may not boost their confidence in independent coping:

"During placement, the subject-teacher was observing all the classes while sitting at the back of the classroom, and the pupils were probably aware of her presence, but I have never been alone with the class and that unnerves me." ST 6

The importance of work experience in attaining ideals was also emphasised by the students who were already practicing as teachers, who suggested that novice teachers are still in the process of building their professional self-concept.

Changes in understanding the teacher's role

In order to capture changes in student teachers' perceptions, the interviewer reminded the participants of the teacher metaphors that they had provided in the survey during their Bachelor and Master level studies. The student teachers' reflections around the metaphors showed that an understanding of the demands of the teaching profession started to materialise during the first placement and completion of teacher education courses. The metaphors triggered reflection about the changes in their understanding of the teacher's role and perceptions of learning:

"I tended to think of myself as a pupil [studying at the Bachelor's level], so for me it was important that the teacher would give me knowledge. But here I see myself as a teacher already, what I want and who I want to be." ST 10

All student teachers listed professional placement as one of the key experiences influencing their development as teachers:

"...The fifth year metaphor is clearly the professional experience speaking in me – that I must adjust myself to pupils, to the class, create emotion and meaning, make the lesson fit them. I mean, I can enter the classroom with a certain emotion or idea, but when you are there, you may realise that, Oh! We must do something quite different! That actually you, like, leap into a totally different context". ST 11

During professional placement student teachers saw teaching from a broader perspective and they took the opportunity to analyse their skills, knowledge and ability to cope with real classroom situations. The interviewees emphasised interaction with pupils:

"Before, I did not know what to think. But, yes, the placement, the possibility of feeling what it means to teach and how the pupils react and all this... the emotion was very positive." ST 7

Mentors, classes of pupils and the school cultures, to which the prospective teachers were exposed, shaped their professional identity during professional placement:

"...I got a very good mentor, a very good class of pupils and then during the professional placement I was there in the school house every day, I don't know, until 8 or 9 p.m., we planned lessons and studies and I, well, I felt it in my heart. I knew that I was in the right place." CT 2

In addition to professional placement, the students considered subject didactics, courses in pedagogy and theoretical core subjects important to their development:

"...My metaphor of psychologist – I think it is because we have been told several times that a teacher is also a psychologist, that she must listen to pupils' concerns, and it has

been made clear to us that it is very important... You actually also have to know your pupils. We have been told this over and over again, in almost all lectures.” CT 5

Student teachers’ development paths

Student teachers’ perceptions of teacher identity are created and recreated through teacher education courses and school placement. In this process, more than half of the participants described various concerns or dilemmas, which they had experienced during different stages of their studies, or which they had experienced in connection with starting their professional career. Two main concerns emerged: doubts about possessing the qualities and skills necessary for the teaching career (e.g. *not the presenting type, not as clever as one should be, will I be able to manage the class in terms of maintaining discipline*) and general concerns over whether they had made the right career choice considering the nature of the teaching job (e.g. *was it the right choice, huge responsibility and work load, will I manage?*).

Some prospective teachers expressed experiencing more tensions during the process of teacher identity formation. Therefore, we compared the interview data with the participants’ intention to enter teacher education, teaching experience, gap between ideal and current conception of self as a teacher, and confidence in one’s career choice as reported in their survey responses in prior years (Appendix 2). We identified four different profiles. There were differences between the experiences of already practicing teachers and inexperienced teachers. In both groups, certain attributes appeared repetitively, on which basis four profiles of teacher identity formation were distinguished.

1) Among the teachers who had no previous work experience, the first group were teachers whose profile can be characterised as *self-efficacious* because they expressed a clear intention to enter teacher education and become a teacher from the beginning of their studies at Bachelor level. Despite a lack of professional experience, they were closest to their envisioned image of ideal teacher as compared to the other interviewees, i.e. scoring 7—8 on a 10-point scale.

„When I went to my internship, I was totally convinced that I’m learning the right thing... and it appeared that I managed really well and the teacher was really pleased with me, and in that sense, I thought that I had made the right choice... I haven’t worked as a teacher, , grading myself maybe ... 7 or 8, I can’t tell... because for the first internship my grade was “very good”, and for the second “extraordinary”, ... that’s why I was afraid to say maximum 10, because how it is with the discipline in the class, and those other things... but the rest, I think, is okay “ ST13

2) The second group's profile could be described as the *doubtful*. This group consisted of students who did not wish to become teachers at the start of studies or began to have doubts regarding their initial intention by the end of their bachelor's studies or entered the teacher education program by chance because they did not have a job after completing the bachelor's studies. Although during professional placement they had found assurance as to their chosen profession, they were not certain of their skills and ability to cope as a teacher, especially with regards to classroom management. They lacked practical experience and felt uncertain about starting a career as a teacher. They also had doubts about their ability to take on a full-time job, some because of their other commitments.

"Well, when I started my studies, I really thought I didn't want to be a teacher and well, at the end of bachelor's studies I thought that maybe I was not smart enough to teach others. But then I thought, well, because it had been really hard to find a job and I didn't get a job anywhere, I thought to look into learning to become a teacher, maybe it would suit me...I have not applied anywhere yet, as I don't even know where to go at all... Right now I haven't thought of it yet, but well, right now I'm thinking of some smaller school where I would like to work, because I hope there aren't too many disciplinary problems." ST 10

Notably, all the interviewees in this profile were prospective subject-teachers. Their perception of how far away they were from their teacher ideal was lower compared to others, i.e. 4-5 points/10.

3) Among the teachers who had previous work experience (0.5-2 years), the first discernible group were teachers who could be characterised as *identity-searchers*. They had doubts during their studies as to whether or not they had made the right choice in selecting the teaching profession and teacher education. At some point they all expressed a doubt in their personal resources because a teacher's work requires a sense of responsibility and is a demanding job. Such doubts were overcome with the help of successful experiences in their professional placement and having supportive key individuals. By the end of their studies, they had decided that they had made the right choice as to the chosen area of specialisation and they all had already begun teaching during the studies.

„So in the first year, I didn't understand at all who I would become because I didn't understand these subjects. During the second year, I had an identity crisis, I didn't know if I wanted to become a teacher although I enjoyed studying, I didn't understand if it's really what I wanted... I felt that the work was a big responsibility, it kind of hit me and made me panic and then I had that setback. But fortunately, I talked to the right people at the right time and got over that fear... During the third year I realized that

it was my speciality, but the turning point was in the fourth year, when I developed such a fanaticism and I truly felt, that I'm ready for it all and the fourth year was the most constructive year, because we learned the most that year and then I was, maybe mature enough, to be ready for the job.“ CT 24)

The second discernible group among the experienced teachers could be called the *experienced realists*. They had made an informed decision in terms of the chosen curriculum and profession. They had not expressed concerns about coping as teachers or had any doubts about the choice of profession. All practicing teachers assessed their distance from the ideal teacher by 4-6 on a 10-point scale.

„Coming to the university, I had already thought to myself that I want to be a teacher... I had worked with a children's group before at a dance festival... and overall, even when I was at school, all kinds of group leading, carrying out exercises was not a problem for me. If it is necessary to stomp with your feet, if you must use a loud voice, then you must use a loud voice, if you need to be quiet, you need to be quiet. And with that there was never any problems, and it was pretty interesting to see how the class started to discipline itself in these issues... really, the students helped me while learning... and then, like that, a sense for what works and what doesn't, what's good and what's not so good developed while working..“ST11

Both the *doubtful* and the *identity-searchers* expressed doubts about both their choice of profession and their ability to cope professionally. This group also included those students who had not expressed the desire to become a teacher in the first or third year surveys, or who had chosen teaching without clear motives for doing so.

Discussion

In light of the professional identity model proposed by Beijaard (1995) and Beijaard and his colleagues (2000), in which the constituents aspects are the relationship with a subject or subjects, the relationship with students, and role conceptions, the results of the study point certain to distinctions. The results suggest that subject matter and pedagogy may play different roles in the construction of teacher identity in prospective class teachers and subject teachers. Similarly, to these results, prior research indicates that for high school teachers (i.e. subject teachers'), professional identity stems mostly from the subject they teach and has a strong and constant influence on the understanding of self as a teacher (Beijaard, 1995). By contrast, the prospective class teachers participating in the study were more focused on their relationship with the pupil and the comprehensive learning process. Many teachers find the pedagogical aspects of their profession more important than the didactical or the subject-matter aspects (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000). The student teachers reflections around the metaphors

they had provided in the Bachelor level surveys showed that in the most cases the role conception had expanded during the placement and at completion of compulsory courses in the teacher education program.

Although teacher identity is influenced by experiences of both external (politics) and internal (organisation or institution) as well as by personal experiences (Day et al., 2006, cf. also Gee, 2000), the student teachers in the present study, irrespective of their teacher education program or subject orientation, tended to associate their image of an ideal teacher predominantly with classroom activities, which may be indicative of a narrow perception of the teacher's work. The ideals expressed by the student teachers in our study appeared to be fairly conservative or "traditional", and raises questions about the role of teacher education and school in reproducing institutional identity (cf. Gee, 2000).

The study shows that teacher education and particularly pedagogical placement influences prospective teachers' perceptions about the role of the teacher and being child-centred. However, there was evidence of a lack of concept of professional development and learning, the analysis of professional experience and the understanding of school as an organisation, suggesting that teacher education may not sufficiently support students in developing a teacher identity based on such a broader notion of the teaching profession. Prospective teachers tended to focus on self at the beginning of their professional growth. A broader understanding of teacher roles and the teacher as a member of the school organisation, collegial cooperation and learning were not reflected in the teacher ideals not even of those novice teachers who had prior work experience. While teamwork and collaboration with parents and other stakeholders are increasingly important elements in the teacher's work, a lack of contextualisation of teacher identity has been reported also in prior research (e.g. Arnon & Reichel, 2007; Stenberg et al., 2014). The school as an institution is part of society, and student teachers should receive support to reflect on their work in a broader societal context. This study indicated that there is a need to pay more attention to discussing school as an organisation and the teacher's other roles in addition to teaching in the teacher education of both class and subject teachers. From the point of view of a teacher's professional growth, collegial cooperation as well as reflection on and development of professional work are essential. This is also important from the perspective of coping with the pressures of the teacher's work, and particularly vital at the beginning of the career (Stenberg et al., 2014).

Based on the background survey data that was available for the interviewed individuals, it is evident already in this limited sample that students take different motivational paths to becoming teachers. Offering pedagogical subjects and practical experience of teaching already

at the Bachelor's level might help students to consider teaching as a potential career choice and support them in making informed decisions. Namely prior research shows that the type of reasons for choosing the profession will make a difference for teachers' intention to remain in the occupation and possibly make a difference in their professional identity as well (Sinclair, Dowson & McInerney, 2006). Offering courses that will help students to get acquainted with teacher education and teaching as a career option might be particularly enriching for prospective student teachers who doubt whether or not teaching is for them (e.g. *doubtful* or *identity-searcher* profiles).

Previous research based on experienced teachers professional identity profiles has distinguished three distinct profiles: (1) an unsatisfied and demotivated identity profile, (2) a motivated and affectively committed identity profile, and (3) a competence doubting identity profile (Canrinus et al, 2011). These profiles have some similarities with the profiles identified in this study concentrating on prospective teachers professional identity development paths. Namely, the *experienced realist* and the *motivated and affectively committed identity profiles* both assume a positive position towards the indicators of teachers' professional identity. They are motivated to teach, their affective job commitment and satisfaction is high. The *doubtful* group of prospective teachers who had doubts about their chosen career choice and about their abilities to start a career as teacher have similarities with the *unsatisfied and demotivated identity profiles* as well with the *competence doubting identity profile* as their self-efficacy beliefs to manage a classroom and affective commitment to teaching are comparably low. As professional identity is shaped through continuous interaction between the individual and his or her context, further research could focus on how this interaction is reflected in changes in teachers' professional identity and the extent to which the novice teachers identity profiles may be connected to identity profiles identified of experienced teachers (cf. Beijaard, 1995). As teacher development takes place through self-awareness and self-understanding (Smyth, 1989; Kelchtermans, 2009), increased focus on the development of reflective skills as well as on analysis of beliefs and competencies, helps to build a more accurate perception of oneself as a prospective teacher and to realise personal development opportunities more clearly. This is important regardless of profile. For instance, students with a *self-efficacious* profile, who lacked work experience but who assessed their skills as very close to their ideal in the secure context of professional placement, may experience a practice shock when they commence work at school.

Within the teacher education program, pedagogical placement played a key role in the development of the prospective teachers' identity. This is understandable because professional

identity can only be shaped in the course of practice where knowledge, skills, understandings and beliefs can be contested. These findings are consistent with the results of other studies (Timošćuk & Ugaste, 2010; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007; Anspal et al., 2012). All student teachers found that professional placement gave them assurance about their choice. However, there may also be an over-reliance on the placement as the key to teacher identity development. The student teachers thought that more teaching experience would help them develop as teachers. They rarely recognized other means of development, nor did they recognize the importance of reflection in facilitating development. Also Beauchamp & Thomas (2010) noted in their study that prospective teachers tended to think that experience alone might be what is needed and only in a few cases did the participants acknowledge that reflection might be connected to their ability to reach their ideal. Thus it is important to strengthen the focus on continuous reflection in teacher education. Support in analysing and reflecting on personal resources and identifying relevant counselling is likely to support students with the profiles of an *identity-searcher* and *doubtful* prospective teacher.

Along with pedagogical placement, the students stressed the importance of educational subjects and subject didactics (cf. identity model by Beijaard et al., 2000) whereas certain core subjects were mentioned less frequently. A teacher's subject-related competence is indeed important, but core subjects need to be tightly associated with the prospective profession. Students' prior school experience and former teachers as well as university professors and placement mentors are important role models in the development of student teachers' professional identity and student teachers relate the professional norms and standards emphasised by these significant others to their real and ideal selves. The student teachers clearly connected the subjects that they felt had most strongly influenced their development with the personality of the relevant professor. This means that university professors are important role models for prospective teachers (also Loughran & Berry, 2005) and there are numerous ways in which they can effectively model teacher behaviors (Lunenberg et al, 2007) that support student teachers in reflecting on their own goals and behaviors. Simultaneously, the question arises as to what extent teacher educators are aware of their personal and professional identity in order to fully support student teachers in their professional identity development. In their studies, student teachers are asked to reflect on the experiences gained from pedagogical placement, but are they encouraged to think how they conceptualise their profession and themselves as teachers? What kind of teacher do they want to be and why is that important for them? Taking into account that the development of teachers' professional identity is an ongoing process, teacher educators should critically examine how they facilitate opportunities for

students to analyse their ideals and how these are connected with beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning, and ultimately, teacher identity.

A limitation of the study is the small number of research participants. The fact that we had surveys from the previous years allowed us to complement the interviews with additional data shedding light on developmental points along the way over a period of five years. In this sense, the mixed methods data available from various points of time allowed us to construct developmental identity profiles. These profiles must, however, be considered with caution and as an exploratory finding at this point. The identified profiles and their manifestation in larger student samples warrants further research.

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