

The Changing Role of the Teacher Educator

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Introduction

In the Netherlands, the function, organisation, content, and quality of teacher education are widely debated (Ministerie OCW 2004, Expertgroep Kwaliteit Lerarenopleiding Primair Onderwijs 2004). Several causes engendered this discussion. On one hand, educational policy urges for a rejuvenation of teacher education. For instance, a recent visitation of all colleges of teacher education supported an existing feeling that the quality of teacher education is below par. Furthermore, the ministry of education emphasizes and other educational organisations recognize the importance of life long teacher professional development and the importance of professional development schools. The development of standards for teacher competence has created new expectations as well as a search for better teacher education programs.

On the other hand, educators and student teachers alike felt dissatisfied about the traditional way teaching and learning is approached. Constructivism, as a philosophy of learning, and student centred learning became the basis of Dutch teacher education, once more bringing on the need to change teacher education curricula.

Prominent topics in the discussion are the development of new learning environments, the new role of the educator, and the changing learner. In every proposal to reform and restructure teacher education, important themes are being considered, such as: social constructivism, the relationship between schools and teacher education colleges, and student centred teaching and learning. Of course, the outcome of teacher education – competent teachers – is also discussed.

In this paper, we describe two case studies in which two teacher educators confronted with a changing educational policy at their college, try to redefine their roles as educator. Firstly, we will describe the background of the changing teacher education program at our colleges. For that, we will focus on the emphasis on social constructivism and student centred approaches. Secondly, we will discuss the changing

role of the teacher educator. Finally, we will describe the two studies about a teacher educator changing her role and the effect on her and her students.

Social constructivism

Social constructivists believe that understanding can not be discovered, it is constructed through human activity. Learning is seen as a social, collaborative process in which learners create new knowledge through a meaning making process in interaction with others (learning in dialogue with peers) and with their reality. Through learning, learners integrate into a knowledge community. Furthermore, knowledge is seen as a product of social activity; meaningful learning comes about when learners are engaged in social activities.

Knowledge is a result of a process of co-creation, of a joint award of giving meaning to experience, perception and information (Castelijns, Koster and Vermeulen 2004). Knowledge and the accompanying frames of reference are consequently confronted with each other so that new knowledge can develop, which will be in a constant flow of construction and actualisation. Castelijns et.al. state that this way of acquiring knowledge will meet the quickly changing demands society puts on people. Autonomy, purposiveness, cumulative learning, cooperative learning, and knowledge acquisition in an authentic and meaningful learning environment are seen as triggers for learning.

Student centred teaching and learning

A point of departure in the development of new teacher education curricula is the development of learner-oriented and demand-driven education in which the role and the needs

of the learner is accentuated. Furthermore, such education stresses the need for student teachers to be responsible for their personal development. This is partly seen as an answer to the changing character of the student teacher itself. Student teachers can be seen as exemplars of the internet generation. For them multitasking is a way of life. Problem solving connects for them to trial and error; problem solving is more like playing games than following a rule-directed, logical approach. Practical knowledge is more important than theoretical knowledge, or differently, doing is more important than knowing. Information and facts change fast; practical approaches are more valuable. In a world where chatting and blogging are gaining importance, the distinction between the creating of knowledge and the user of knowledge is fading. For the internet generation, knowing has a different meaning compared to that of their educators.

In Hubert Coonen's view (2005), modern teachers and consequently teacher educators should consistently ask themselves whether their students really develop professionally, whether the program offered leads to meaningfulness on the part of the student and whether the program facilitates the student in distinguishing in complex matters. Traditional teachers have also asked those questions, but they looked from a different perspective and their answers do not resemble the answers given today. Besides having factual subject knowledge, construing and innovating are, according to the Coonen, two core assignments of each up to date teacher and educator. Those teachers and educators will open themselves to new developments in the field of subject matter, the way young people learn, the educational structure, the use of new technological findings, interdisciplinary cooperation, and the linking of life and learning.

Based on experiences with student teachers, who are less motivated through the more traditional approach of teacher education colleges, and on an analysis of the real world of student teachers, educators were motivated to change teacher education curricula towards programs in which student teachers are responsible for their own learning process

As a consequence of this, teacher educators try to change teacher educating programs, allowing student teachers to create and investigate practical knowledge and discussing practical experiences with educators and fellow students during their internship and at the college. Simultaneously, teacher educators try to link student teachers' practical knowledge with theoretical knowledge. An attitude of (intellectual) eagerness and the ability to reflect is conditional to this.

One of the assumptions is that this type education will ensure more flexibility and more space for diversity and individual and joint contributions. The learners will be the ones to make their own choices as to what subject matter they would like to concentrate on. They learn to plan, take counsel together and cooperate. In the Netherlands, this view on learning is called *het nieuwe leren* (new learning)

The role of the teacher educator

Reconstructing the content and goal of teacher education programs, and changing the educational philosophy behind these programs induces changes in the role of the teacher educator. The point of view, one hears in discussions around the construction of a better teacher education program, claims that the educator's role should be a more guiding and supervising one. Besides being subject matter experts, teacher educators should be flexible, and able to cooperate and reflect. Their guidance should model what they expect student teachers to do when guiding primary school students.

Therefore, teacher educators should not transmit knowledge, they should not tell students what they know, but they should facilitate knowledge construction causing learners to direct their own learning process. They should not be executors of programs they did not develop themselves; more and more they should be co-creators of education.

However, many teacher educators are trapped between this new vision, their beliefs and educational practices. They understand the philosophy; they understand that to have student teacher construct knowledge, the student teachers need to be able to discuss and justify their thinking and take responsibility for their learning. But, most have experienced a number of non-motivated students, students not being involved with their courses, not showing any initiative or a reflective attitude, and students being calculative during the whole duration of their studies. This brings to mind many unanswered questions, like: what to do when student teachers do not take responsibility, what to do when student teachers do not construct their knowledge? Many teacher educators see themselves as responsible for the development of the student teachers. And deep down they believe that when student teachers do not take responsibility, they still have to transmit the knowledge.

Furthermore, given a watershed between those who develop and those who execute, it has not been planned how these foreseen changes should be implemented, let alone how teacher educators have to realise their new role. So, the notorious gap between theory and practice can be seen here at the level of teacher education. This forms one more reason why many educators do not know how to implement these changes.

As teacher educators, we are also confronted with a quest for our new role. Investigating our own teaching behaviour, we had to conclude that we hardly allowed the students any space to direct their own learning process or knowledge construction. We did most of the talking during lessons. Clearly, the lack of construction space and the lack of productive interaction between us and the student teachers do not bring about any active learning by the student teachers.

As teacher educators and as researchers, we are interested in acquiring insight in educational practices that bring about knowledge construction by student teachers. We are interested in a variety of aspects concerning the role of the educator, for instance: the creation of a problematic situation, the creation of construction space, co-creating knowledge, co-learning, the questioning, the building of a community, and the building of trust. We are also interested in the relationship between inspiration, teaching and learning. But here, the question that drives our interest is how to alter the context of teaching so that student teachers use and value the offered construction space.

Two practical studies

We have been following two teacher educators investigating their teaching practices while implementing the educational policy and the new curriculum of their college. Each work at a Dutch university of professional studies: Hogeschool Drenthe, respectively Hogeschool Zuyd. Both universities are developing and implementing a curriculum in which the notion of teacher education through the transmission of knowledge will be transformed to the notion that learning to be a teacher will be lifelong professional development. Hogeschool Drenthe focuses on competence-based learning, and moves from study program-driven education towards demand-driven education. Hogeschool Zuyd has its focus on competence-based learning and a demand-driven support structure in education.

Study 1: Coaching an uncertified teacher

In this study we look at a teacher educator coaching an uncertified teacher. The context was defined by the obviously externally motivated uncertified teacher, Kees, who had come to the college to quickly earn his qualification.

However, the teacher educator's expectations were on earlier experiences with uncertified teachers: she expected him to have an intrinsic motivation and to be able to learn independently. She realized too late, he was not. In the first couple of weeks, Kees' learning process did not come off. He did not learn and so there was no coaching. He got stuck, and so did the teacher educator.

She did not mention this to him, out of fear of having to admit that her coaching had failed. However, when she no longer knew what to do she consulted her network. Colleagues advised her to tell Kees: "I want you to make a choice in what you are concentrating on: fight against what the teaching program offers you or pull yourself together and open yourself up for learning." At the same time another teacher educator visited Kees. After he had seen him teaching, he said: "you stand in front of the class like a major standing in front of his army."

For Kees, these events proved to be a breaking point. He told the educator he wanted to continue, but did not know how to do this. For the first time they really got to talk to each other. This situation full of conflict resulted in an opening up towards each other, in a daring to be vulnerable and frank about what had happened.

The two started relating to each other, there was a dialogue, in safety, as they both were frank to each other. What arose was a relation as a basis for coaching in whatever form. Kees explained that he had difficulties in processing theory. The educator seized this opportunity to invent learning contexts for him in which she could coach him the way he needed. She used the theory he chose to make him observe his own teaching, reflect on that so to bring about changes. He learned how to handle the feedback she gave him, and to talk about which principles were important to him in teaching and consequently about what kind of teacher he wanted to be. He even started to investigate the effect of his educational choices on his students. He felt supported and taken seriously, resulting in Kees allowing her to challenge him. Furthermore, he paid much more attention to reflecting on his own teaching than on criticizing the teaching of others. And, instead of doing the learning imposed by others, he proved to be able to professionalize his learning experience and the questions that arose during that process.

The teacher educator had been at a loss what to do with this student and during her coaching of Kees; she has learned to express this and dare to be vulnerable herself. As described before, this resulted in a relationship, which allowed her to create a secure context in which both Kees and she professionalized. She had learned to take the student's view of teaching as a starting point for her coaching, and being able to lead him towards a process in which he could investigate that view irrespective of her beliefs. Her letting him go enabled him to follow his own path towards professionalizing. She had learned that being in relation and feeling secure are essential conditions for coaching, which has been confirmed by the process both the student and she have gone through and from which they both learned.

The relation emerged from conflict. Once the relation was there, the student opened up to assignments. By creating weekly conversations, they came nearer to each other and it became possible to discuss educational notions, without getting emotional, by which theory was linked to practical change.

At the moment, the educator no longer coaches individual

students; she now coaches teams of primary school teachers and tries to transfer what she has learned through her investigation of the coaching of Kees to the coaching of a team in competence-based coaching. She wants to construe a cycle of design stages: designing and field testing, reflection, redesigning and field testing, reflection, redesigning the coaching and field testing on a fresh team. Her coaching will be aimed at first building a relationship and then starting off from their practical coaching experience, linking those experiences to theory in order to have them plan, act, observe and reflect on their coaching of student teachers. Of course, in building the relationship she will have to open up and if needed mention her own vulnerability. One of the first problems she has to tackle is that part of the team is not familiar with or is even mistrusting competence-based learning while she will have to handle the team as a whole.

Study 2: How to alter the offered construction space of learning so that student teachers use and value it

The educational changes mentioned before are also taking place at the University of Professional Studies Zuyd, in Maastricht. Each faculty program has to be demand-driven, competence-based and tailor-made. Over the years, the teacher educator has been noticing that even in their third year in college many students show dependence and are only focusing on results. She realized that this was partly due to the way she defined her role as teacher educator. Although she used various teaching methods, the learning environment she created apparently did not challenge the students enough to show commitment. Now she intends to alter this environment in such a way that students will feel challenged and become more active. She investigated the effect of changes implemented by her in one of her courses by observing and interviewing student teachers and reflecting on her new role as part of a demand-driven environment.

Her 'dream' was to see students at work, who after a short introduction, would come to her with questions, would want to investigate matters, would come up with suggestions making each meeting a turmoil of activities they themselves had initiated and in which student teachers would link practical knowledge with theoretical knowledge. She had defined her new role as educator as a more guiding and supervising one. She wanted to make the students responsible for their learning. To realize this dream, she had created a learning environment in which students would be more responsible for their own learning process: they would work in groups of three and choose their way of processing theory based on their learning experience.

The students

Within their groups, the students have been invited to discuss various ways of processing theory, discuss their preference in learning, studying and performing. They were not used to this approach in which initiative and commitment was asked for. The educator advised some of the groups so that they would extend the various ways they had found themselves and by asking them if this was really what they wanted. "Is this what you really like to do" she once asked. One of the students answered: "Do you mean we have to like learning?" At the end of that session, the students gave her their planning concerning the processing of theory and their preferred way of studying. During the following weeks, they could adjust their planning after consulting the educator. The next few sessions

the students have worked in groups on the assignments that had been designed by them and in ways they preferred. It was obvious that there was to be difference in approach between them. There were groups that started off with a well defined aim and diligently worked towards it, whereas others did not know before their third session what they actually wanted to do.

During each session the teacher educator was available. She observed the way the different groups were learning and over and over she had to consider whether to intervene or not. The student teachers approached her mainly when they were in disequilibrium regarding theory and were searching for clarification.

Results

In this new learning environment and through her new role definition, the student educator had put more trust in the student teachers' capacity of constructing knowledge. The student teachers were less dependent on her and the degree of contributing to the learning process between them and her was more in balance. Besides, the relation between the students and her became more easy going. Furthermore, she noticed that students discussed dilemmas and theory more intense compared to previous classes and the concluding presentations were also of a higher standard than before.

The changes the educator went through are in the field of interpersonal change and interrelated with it at the level of teacher education a change in pedagogical views and teaching methods. Her role as an educator has changed; her interventions, based on her observation (questions, additions, remarks), were better adjusted to what the student teachers needed. She was also able to confront her students with her observations and discuss these with them.

At the end of her investigation, she also realized that previously she took the initiative away from the students. For instance, she would explain in detail how an assignment could be worked out, and this was copied by 80 percent of the students. Now she understood that these students liked being on the safe side and she allowed them to do so.

Gradually, she realized how often she had advised students unasked for, giving suggestions and providing them with new information. She was the one to know, she was the one to bear responsibility, of having to design contexts in which the student teachers could start constructing knowledge. If this took too long, she was inclined to start telling and teaching them. In contrast, during this course, she intentionally debated how to support the student teachers and by only questioning them she has tried to get them to a greater insight. She has given them space to get to talk to each other, discuss things and construct knowledge together.

She also realized that student teachers assess the educator's role as excellent when he or she is around to answer their questions. That is not in accordance with her norms. She sees the role of an educator differently. For instance, she wants to contribute to a more reflective attitude in the student when she sees fit to do that. Then the question arises: what exactly is the right moment to intervene? In what way can she contribute to a deepening of the student's learning process? As an educator she feels the need to have wider range of intervention tools at her disposal. She does not yet feel competent enough to support the student teachers in their learning in such a way that they will constantly be on the edge between knowing and not knowing.

She plans to formulate criteria for the student teachers' results before starting on a new course, as there was great variation in the final presentations and she found it hard to

compare PowerPoint presentations with play acting, written text and web content.

Review

As indicated before, Dutch teacher education is on the move. Tomorrow's teacher educators need to fulfill a different role and work in a different teacher education organization. At present, the function, organization, content and quality of teacher education in the Netherlands is widely debated (Ministerie OCW 2004, Expertgroep Kwaliteit Lerarenopleiding Primair Onderwijs 2004). Amongst others, changes in student teachers' behavior, character and motivation, a renewed emphasis on life long professionalization, changes in the character and use of knowledge, and a report about the quality of teacher education are at the basis of this need to redesign teacher education. Furthermore, a better understanding of the process of learning adds to this need.

The actual development in teacher education is towards learner-orientated and demand-driven education. For teacher educators this has major implications. At meetings at the college, the philosophy underneath these changes is being discussed; and during design meetings, changes in the curriculum are being designed and discussed. However, hardly ever teacher educators are invited or challenged to discuss the implications for the role of and their behavior as teacher educator. Conversations with teacher educators show that many feel a watershed between those who 'own' the aforementioned philosophical basis of teacher education and those who are supposed to implement it.

In this paper, we followed two teacher educators struggling to implement changes in their role as teacher educator. They have experimented with their changing roles and did research on that. Both studies focus on how they altered the context of teaching so that student teachers use and value the offered construction space.

The first practical study reports on the (unintended) creation of a problematic situation, the building of trust and relationship emerging from that situation, the co-construction of an understanding of theory linked to practice and of inspired professionalizing in two people at two levels, teaching and coaching. Of course, the teacher educator was aware of the importance of the relationship between her and the student teacher. However, in the new context she had to redefine that relationship and she had to construct new tools to create a relationship.

The second practical study reports on an intended creation of co-learning, co-constructing knowledge, the building of a community of learners, the building of trust. Furthermore it reports about inspired teaching and learning. The teacher educator became aware of her struggle between, on one side, gaining motivation and losing control on the process and quality by allowing student teachers to construct knowledge themselves, on the other side, gaining control on the external quality and the learning process and losing student teachers' independent learning by showing and telling them what to do. She also found she lacked intervention tools.

Changing teacher education programs without inspiring teacher educators to change their teaching is not working. Even when teacher educators are well aware of the need to change their teaching, they will feel a lack of educational tools and routines to work in these new programs. Just as we have seen with student teachers, telling the teacher educator what tools they need to use and what routines they need to put in place, will not work. They, too, need to construct this knowledge. The two teacher educators reporting on this study have only just started to construct those tools and routines when they

researched their teaching and the effect of their teaching on student teachers.

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