STUDENT TEACHERS' INTERNALLY PERSUASIVE BORDERLAND DISCOURSE AND TEACHER IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT. Many scholars stress that learning to become a teacher also entails developing a coherent teacher identity. We think of teacher identity as a general understanding of oneself, resulting in a set of characteristics as a teacher and we introduce the notion of Internally Persuasive Borderland Discourse (IPBD) as a means to study the development of teacher identity during teacher education. In an IPBD a student teacher dialogically tests ideas and believes about himself as a teacher. Using a grounded theory approach to analyzing the IPBD's of 10 student teachers participating in a post-graduate university teacher education program we found that the voice of significant others in the IPBD's was used for authorization, as embodiment of the nature of teaching and as a marker of good teaching. We also found that the student teachers used 4 dialogical strategies in the IPBD's, labelled by us as 'personal discourse', 'intentional discourse', 'developmental discourse' and 'non-fit discourse'. Overlooking the 10 IPBD's we distinguish 2 types of teacher identity narrations: 1) goal oriented narration and 2) explorative narration. Both types of narratives testify to the efforts student teachers put into developing a convincing image of themselves as teachers.

KEYWORDS: student teachers, teacher identity, borderland discourse, internally persuasive discourse, dialogical strategies, significant others.

Beginning teachers are not always able to combine the realities of school practice with the way they perceive themselves as a teacher. Pietsch (2011) found that those who are unsuccessful in this became disillusioned and eventually withdraw from teaching (Pietsch, 2011). Beginning teachers who decide to quit their job during or after the teacher education programme often do not have a convincing image of themselves as a teacher (Hong, 2010). These teachers feel as though they do not 'fit' as a teacher when they are confronted with situations that expose disparate parts of who they consider themselves to be. Beginning teachers can be challenged by disruptive pupils to be strict while at the same time they feel the need to be friendly and understanding. In this example two of the multiple possible identity positions known to the beginning teacher (that of the 'strict disciplinarian' and that of the 'warm people person') are in conflict and challenge the creation of a coherent idea of oneself as a teacher.

Alsup (2006) has shown the importance of coherence, or internal agreement, between disparate identity positions when entering the teaching profession. From analysing six case studies of student teachers she finds that student teachers have to deal with tensions between personal values and ideas, and social and cultural working conditions in order to successfully start working as a teacher. Other researchers found that coherence between different identity positions was a central part of successful adaptation to the demands of the profession (Johnson et al., 2010).

Current teacher education curricula have traditionally placed most emphasis on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that teachers need in their work (Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2005; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). Often these are captured in professional standards and performance indicators (Mayer, Reid, Santoro & Singh, 2011). Increasingly it is argued that becoming a teacher not only involves overcoming 'technical' problems that can be solved by adequate training and sufficient practice (Grudnoff, 2011). To acknowledge the personal and emotional struggles that (beginning) teachers face during the teacher education programme, many scholars have started to stress that learning to become a teacher also entails identity development, specifically aimed at developing a *coherent teacher identity* (e.g., Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2008; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

Teacher identity can be seen as a general understanding of oneself, resulting in a set of characteristics as a teacher. We consider these characteristics as personal, stemming from character and biography, as well as professional, stemming from social working conditions. Teacher identity typifies someone, for example as 'a friendly teacher', 'an enthusiastic teacher', an expert in subject matter, or a 'constructionist teacher'. In line with the increased recognition for the process of identity development of beginning teachers, teacher education programmes have started to pay attention to this process (Hong, 2010; Timmerman, 2009).

In this article we focus on how the development of teacher identity in a teacher education programme can be understood. We do so by exploring the way in which student teachers differ in developing a convincing image of themselves as teachers. We focus especially on the way in which student teachers create coherence when narrating their teacher identity in their portfolios. Before going into the details of our study, we describe in the next section how we conceptualise teacher identity and teacher identity development.

Theoretical framework

A dialogical approach in conceptualising teacher identity

While many studies emphasise the importance of teacher identity, there is not yet one generally accepted conceptualisation of teacher identity. Based on reviewing

research into professional identity in relation to teachers and teacher education, Beijaard et al. (2004) concluded that literature often lacks a clear definition of professional identity. We do notice growing consensus on the way in which identity is to be understood. In line with Rodgers and Scott (2008) teacher identity is considered by most scholars: (1) as dependent on and formed by social, cultural, political and historical contexts; (2) as formed while interacting with others, a formation that is strongly influenced by emotions; (3) as changeable and complex; and (4) as constructed while making sense of who you are by means of personal discourses.

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) have described how these ideas on teacher identity reflect a broader movement in identity theories more generally. Whereas identity theories have long focused on the individuality, continuity and unity of a person's identity, recent theories, influenced by the poststructuralist movement in philosophy, have come to stress how identity is rather social, discontinuous and multiple in nature. Richardson, Rogers, and McCarroll (1998) as well as Hermans (2006) described this post-modern conceptualisation of identity as a reaction to both pre-modern and modern understandings of identity. These characterisations take in consideration empirical research, also about teacher identity, that has shown how people can act and position themselves differently in different relations, contexts, and at different times (e.g., Harré, Moghaddam, Pilkerton Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009).

The characterisation of (teacher) identity as social, discontinuous and multiple is a complex construct that needs further theoretical elaboration. As the most elaborate dialogical approach to identity, the theory of 'dialogical self' provides an elaborate account of identity as *both* unitary and multiple, *both* continuous and discontinuous, and *both* individual and social. The value of a dialogical approach resides in overcoming a dualist and dichotomous stance towards identity. On the basis of this approach, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) suggest defining 'teacher identity', and 'being someone who teaches' as 'an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one's (working) life' (p. 315). (Beginning) teachers continuously try to make sense of the different I-positions, or identity positions, that make up who they consider themselves to be as teachers. In dialogical self theory, I-positions have been described as 'voiced' positions or speaking personalities that each bring forward a specific viewpoint and story about oneself (Bakhtin, 1981; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2001).

Teacher identity development is often presented as a struggle because (student) teachers have to make sense of varying and sometimes conflicting identity positions (Alsup, 2006; Beijaard et al., 2004). When teacher identity is perceived not as a something that you have but as a process of formation and ongoing development (Beijaard et al., 2004; Cohen, 2010; Van den Berg, 2002), the question is what that process is about.

Self-narration

According to dialogical self theory, the process of the development of identity is about self-narration (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). That is, the continuous telling and retelling of one's story about whom one considers oneself to be. Narratives are a way of telling the story of who you are and therefore important to forming an identity. Self-narratives have been considered as an important tool for understanding teacher identity. If student teachers are invited to narrate the experiences they come across while functioning as a teacher, they automatically engage in the process of making sense of these experiences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

Alsup (2006) refers to student teachers' challenging process of self-narration as a matter of 'borderland discourse'. Borderland discourse is a series of conversations one has, with oneself and with others, about the relation between different characteristics of oneself as a person and as a professional (Alsup, 2006). Student teachers may use different strategies when connecting and combining these conversations about oneself as a teacher. Beijaard et al. (2004) showed that teachers differ in the way they discuss professional characteristics depending on the personal value connected to them. Others showed that teachers struggle to give meaning to their different personal characteristics and ideas (Alsup, 2006; Niessen, 2008). Niessen (2008) for instance presents a teacher who is interested in educational changes and is prepared to improve his didactics but who is held back because of the traditional ideas he got from his father about being a proper teacher.

Significant others

Research has shown that significant others can strongly influence the quality of how student teachers handle new situations and challenging circumstances (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Rots (2010) concludes that 'support from teacher educators, mentors, and/or other important people (e.g., parents, peers . . .) is a crucial condition for student teachers to persevere when facing difficulties and disappointments' (p. 151). Through interaction with significant others student teachers are confronted with ideas about who they are (and have been) but also with one's own and others' ideas about how to be a teacher.

During teacher education, teacher educators engage in conversations with student teachers about their experiences as teachers and assess and discuss the assignments student teachers produce about themselves as teachers. A teacher educator is one of the many significant others that influence the self-narration of beginning teachers. Not in the least because it is often the teacher educator who is inclined to listen to the stories student teachers tell about themselves as beginning teachers. Using the notion of multivoicedness, Bakhtin (1981) pointed out how utterances are always addressed and how the addressee is always partial to the utterance - the story - itself.

Self-narratives about oneself as a teacher that are directed at the supervising teacher educator will then always to some extent echo the voice of this educator and the beliefs and values he or she holds about being a teacher.

Internally persuasive borderland discourse

In order to make sense of their teacher identity it has been argued that student teachers need to negotiate the voices of authorities, such as teacher educators, cooperating teachers, school philosophies and so on (Farnsworth, 2010). Farnsworth used Bakhtin's concept of internally persuasive discourse for conceptualising this process of negotiating the voices of others:

> [. . .] the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organises masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. [. . .] The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open, in each of the new contexts that dialogise it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer ways to mean. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 345-346)

We understand internally persuasive discourse as 'a dialogic regime of the participants' testing ideas and searching for the boundaries of personally-vested truths' (as argued by Matusov and Von Duyke, 2009). In internally persuasive discourse one is aware of the voices of others, voices that shape ones own words. It is considered internally persuasive because ideas about oneself are dialogically tested and forever testable. For student teachers the act of engaging in dialogue about oneself as a teacher contributes to developing new truths about oneself as a teacher, also when this dialogue includes doubts, challenges and questions (Matusov and Von Duyke, 2009).

By connecting the notion of internally persuasive to the concept of borderland discourse described by Alsup (2006), we consider texts and conversations in which student teachers discuss the question 'who am I as a teacher?' as internally persuasive borderland discourse (IPBD). In doing so we take into account the dialogical character of the borderland discourse. In IPBDs student teachers repeatedly test their ideas and beliefs about themselves as teachers. Next to making sense of the relation between different characteristics of oneself as a person and as a professional (i.e., borderland discourse) we want to stress the importance of achieving consciousness and agency of one's *own* discourse when developing a coherent sense of self as a teacher (i.e., internal persuasion).

In this article we want to question how student teachers construct IPBD and how IPBD relates to coherence in teacher identity. Whereas several empirical explorations have been presented of student teachers' narrations and the struggles they go through (e.g., Alsup, 2006; Farnsworth, 2010), it is not yet clear in what different ways student teachers negotiate different characterisations as a teacher. Knowledge about IPBD will

help us get a grip on the ways in which student teachers produce a self-narration aimed at developing coherence in teacher identity. The questions framing this study are:

1. How do student teachers refer to significant others in their internally persuasive borderland discourse?

2. What dialogical strategies are used by student teachers to construct internally persuasive borderland discourse?

Understanding the construction and nature of IPBDs is not only of theoretical interest for teacher identity, but also crucial for deriving clues on how to stimulate and guide teacher identity development in teacher education programmes. Teacher educators can use knowledge about IPBDs when stimulating and supporting student teachers when talking about their development as teachers.

Method

Participants

In this study we used data from the portfolios of 10 student teachers participating in the post-graduate university teacher education programme of Utrecht University.

Instruments

As part of the post-graduate university teacher education programme student teachers are asked to discuss their ideas about teaching and being a teacher in a portfolio (Van Tartwijk, Van Rijswijk, Tuithof, & Driessen, 2008). Student teachers are stimulated to write about their experiences in school and to discuss how they perceive themselves as teachers. As part of the portfolio the 10 student teachers were instructed to write a profile of oneself as a teacher at the start of the educational programme (the start profile) and at the end of the programme (the end profile). The instructions given to student teachers for writing their start profile and end profile stressed the importance of voicing one's own ideals and teacher images. We asked consent from the student teachers to analyse their portfolios for this study and they all gave permission. From the start and end profiles we selected those paragraphs of the text that dealt with the questions 'who am I?', 'who am I as a teacher?', 'what do I consider as that what is demanded from me?'. For each student the selected texts together presented a narrative that we analysed as internally persuasive borderland discourse (IPBD).

Analysis

Using a grounded theory approach all selected texts in the IPBDs were studied in a cyclic-iterative process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This cyclic process resulted in four dialogical strategies used by student teachers in the texts. The authors provided for

interrater reliability. First all selected narratives were independently coded using the four dialogical strategies by the first and the third author. The coding system and the codes were discussed between all authors and differences between the codes given to the selected narratives were discussed and resolved. After this the first author analysed the selected narratives in which the use of the voice of others appeared and based on this all authors discussed the role of significant others in IPBDs.

Results

In this section we present the findings of analysing the IPBDs of 10 student teachers in the post-graduate teacher education programme of Utrecht University. First, we discuss in what ways student teachers refer to significant others when narrating who they are as teachers. After this we will share our findings regarding the dialogical strategies used in IPBDs.

The role of others in IPBDs

As expected from the dialogical nature of IPBD and the important role significant others play in the self-narration of student teachers, throughout all IPBDs the voices of others reverberate. Student teachers present three different ways in which the voices of others are used in IPBDs: (1) for authorisation; (2) as embodiment of the nature of teaching; and (3) as markers of good teaching.

In the case of *authorisation* the voices of others are used to illustrate or prove statements about character strengths and skills. Significant others that appear in the text are friends, former teachers, family members, peer students, pupils, school mentors, other colleagues in school and colleagues from other jobs. Quotes from others, in separate text boxes or fragments emerging in the text, are used by the student teachers to build their case, using phrases such as 'I have heard often from my friends . . .' or 'Like my school mentor said about my development . . .'. One student, for instance, refers to the comments of girlfriends and her parents to make her case as a socially capable teacher:

> I think my sincere interest in pupils is characteristic for me (this connects to my enthusiasm). My girlfriends call this my sixth sense for the happiness of others. And as my parents said when I was at university: Y. studies socially (not so much geography). I really like working with people.

Or in the words of another student pleading her case as a potential teacher:

> I am a fairly extravert individual, who will most likely say too much in stead of being too quiet. What I mean by that is that I can come across very driven and professional, because of my enthusiasm. A friend of mine (S., 29 years old) thinks that because of that I will be able to stand my ground in the classroom. Also because I can communicate convincingly and also because I have a strong voice. Because of this it

seems I am a confident person. When I was in high school I loved being in front of the class and telling my story during a presentation. My Dutch teacher at that time gave me a very good grade for my presentation about symbolism. She advised me to do something with this in the future.

Second, pupils, colleagues and parents of pupils are put forward by student teachers as the *embodiment of the nature of teaching*. Pupils are often referred to as representing the challenging part of being a teacher. Student teachers discuss their behaviour and attitude when talking about challenging situations and use these examples to describe the demands of the job. At the same time, pupils and colleagues can be seen as representing what is attractive about the job. They embody the working environment of teachers. Student teachers talk about how stimulating it is to work with people who consider learning and development as natural. The voice of others can be used to present ideas and beliefs about what teaching is and to underline or contrast how the student teacher wants to act him/herself, as is presented in the account of this student teacher:

> I also believe that everybody is able to learn. I also teach classes where 'never mind, I am never going to understand that' can be heard a lot. Fortunately not in my classes, because if I would hear this I would do anything to help those people understand.

Third, student teachers refer to others to explain goals and *markers for being a good teacher*. When thinking about what kind of teacher they want to be, student teachers refer to the things they hope pupils will say about them in the future. Also, when describing notions of their ideal teacher, student teachers often refer to their own former teachers. In the words of this student teacher:

> My 'role-model' teacher is Mr. K. of my old high school. He was my history teacher. And he is a role model for me because I sneakily learned a lot in his classes, without knowing it at the time. He told us a lot of stories and made them lively by adding anecdotes. From these anecdotes you could learn much more than was necessary for the history lesson. He also made room for small talk; he knew what was going on inside the classroom but also outside of it. But Mr. K. could also get very mad, but that was always justified. His boundaries were clear. What I would like is that students think of me as a nice and kind teacher, with whom there is room for a joke but with whom hard work is also needed. A teacher of which students say: 'She knows how to teach'. At the moment I do not know that yet, of course, but I hope that one day I will.

As shown in Table 1 (top of next page), in five out of the 10 IPBDs analysed in this study the three ways of using the voice of others appeared. Two student teachers used others solely to express their thoughts about what good teaching entails for them.

Table 1. *Use of the voice of others in the IPBDs*

Student	Authorisation	Embodiment nature of teaching	Markers of good teaching
1	X	-	X
2	X	X	X
3	X	X	-
4	X	X	X
5	X	X	X
6	X	X	-
7	-	-	X
8	X	X	X
9	-	-	X
10	X	X	X

Eight student teachers used others, from their personal and from their professional circle, to prove and illustrate their skills and characteristics as a teacher. Although the voices of others reverberate throughout all IPBDs the way others were used for authorising the claims about personal skills and characteristics differ. Five out of the 10 student teachers use others, within work but also friends and family, to explicitly build their case as beginning professional teachers, for instance:

> It is no surprise I enrolled in the teacher education programme. As a child I wanted to become a schoolteacher. At that time I thought about teaching primary school. I had a younger sister who I patiently taught and explained stuff. As witnessed by our childhood videotapes.

The other three student teachers also use the voice of others to scaffold the statements they make about their abilities. However, they do not connect these remarks explicitly to being a teacher; they mainly present a picture of their personal qualities. In doing this they seem to leave the answer to the question, 'are these qualities suitable for being a teacher?' implicit in the text and to be answered by the recipient of the story.

Dialogical strategies in IPBDs

We found four different dialogical strategies that student teachers used to discuss oneself as a teacher, which we have called: (1) personal discourse; (2) intentional discourse; (3) developmental discourse; and (4) non-fit discourse. In this

section we describe and illustrate the four dialogical strategies and highlight how these appear in the IPBDs of the 10 student teachers.

One of the dialogical strategies we found was the *personal discourse*. In personal discourse student teachers present being a teacher as logical because of personal characteristics and qualities. Student teachers argue their suitability for the teaching job by connecting personal traits to teacher skills. They emphasise how personal strengths, characteristics and their life biographies are naturally related to being a teacher. Typical phrases used by student teachers in personal discourse are: *My qualities are. . ., I know I am good at . . ., since my youth I have known that . . ..* In the words of one of the student teachers:

> I think I am good at making contact with people and making them feel at ease. By acquaintances I am sometimes described as 'everyone's pal', because of what I have written above. This quality comes in very handy when I am teaching. Students quickly feel that I want what is best for them, that I am easy to talk to and that they can be themselves around me. It is this connection to students from which my other teacher-competencies result; teaching enthusiastically in a calm and clear way.

A second dialogical strategy we found was the *intentional discourse*. In intentional discourse student teachers present being a teacher as instrumental in reaching their personal ambitions. Student teachers talk about how personal goals and needs can be realised through working in educational practice. Student teachers explain why they are motivated to become a teacher and why the job will be satisfying: it provides them with a good opportunity to act on their ideas about life in general. Student teachers use phrases like: *what I want . . ., what is important to me . . ., my ambitions are . . ..* One of the student teachers, for instance, speaks about her idealistic expectations towards being a teacher:

> My ideal as a teacher is to become a link between two worlds. These are fine words of course, but I mean that, on the one hand, that I can help students find their way in the lessons I provide them with. In this I mean teaching knowledge. I want to be directive, but mostly like a guide. On the other hand I would like to be seen not only as a teacher but also like a 'human being'. With this I mean that students can come to me with other (personal) stuff, besides questions about history. I think that, as a teacher you should also take on the role of a tutor. I realise my goals will not be easy to reach, but they are my ambitions and I am willing to work hard!

A third dialogical strategy we found was the *developmental discourse*. In a developmental discourse student teachers talk about how continuous growth, persevering and reflection are characteristic, both for the job as for the student teacher themselves. Because of the complex nature of teaching and the long time it will take to master the needed skills completely, being able to develop and grow is considered important by student teachers as well as by the teacher education programme. Student

teachers value reflection even though not all students automatically are at ease with the reflection assignments they receive during the teacher education programme (Bronkhorst, Meijer, Koster & Vermunt, 2012). They argue that being a teacher is all about learning and development. In this discourse student teachers use phrases like: *I think about how I can improve my own behaviour as a teacher . . ., as a teacher I keep learning . . . , I worked hard to grow as a teacher through . . ..* One of the student teachers for instance connects how she wants to live her life to being in a teaching job:

> By teaching, I am able to develop concerning my subject. The development and ideas of students make sure I continue to think about what is important in life. Especially the phase in which students make ideological choices is crucial in this. This way I continue to work on my ideals and what comes of these. To stay young (not to freeze in a specific kind of thinking) you can best be among youngsters. Where can this be better achieved but at school?

The fourth dialogical strategy we found was the *non-fit discourse*. In a non-fit discourse student teachers acknowledge that obstacles can occur when working as a teacher. They describe how being a teacher demands dealing with these obstacles and how being a teacher can be a challenge. Student teachers actively explore the possibility that teaching might not be a good career option. Considering who they are and what is asked of them while functioning as a teacher is a way to question if they can be a teacher, also when the tentative answers to this question might be negative. Student teachers can be seen presenting a hypothesis about their fit as a teacher in which they openly explore the possibility that who they are and who they have to be as a teacher might not be united. Phrases used in these non-fit discourses are: *for me it's difficult . . . , a teacher should . . . , but I . . . , I do not know if I truly want to . . ..* One of the student teachers verbalises her questions about being a teacher as:

> Now I have to deal with youngsters, who expect me to take charge. This is a new role for me, one that I am trying to take by going through ups and downs. I have had to get used to being in the centre of attention, because then I feel very vulnerable. Every time I think it is scary to walk through a school, passing the staring eyes of students. But when I am in front of the class, telling my story and feeling a connection with the students, then all fear fades away.

We have found that all student teachers presented at least three dialogical strategies in their IPBD. An oversight of the presence of dialogical strategies in the IPBDs is presented in Table 2 (top of next page). Personal and intentional discourses appeared in all 10 IPBDs. Eight out of the 10 student teachers employed developmental discourse and six out of the 10 employed the non-fit discourse.

Table 2. *Presence of dialogical strategies in IPBDs*

Student	Personal discourse	Intentional discourse	Developmental discourse	Non-fit discourse
1	X	X	X	-
2	X	X	X	-
3	X	X	X	X
4	X	X	X	X
5	X	X	X	X
6	X	X	-	X
7	X	X	X	X
8	X	X	X	-
9	X	X	X	-
10	X	X	-	X

Overlooking the 10 IPBDs we can distinguish two types of teacher identity narrations: (1) goal-oriented narration; and (2) explorative narration. In both types of teacher identity narrations dialogical strategies as described above were used, but in different ways. The student teachers of the first type of identity narration, here typified as '*goal oriented*', predominantly employ *personal discourse* in the start profile part of the IPBD. They start their story about themselves as a teacher by enthusiastically pleading their case based on the personal strengths and qualities useful when aiming to be a teacher. After this these student teachers present a more balanced view of themselves in their final profile. From the start profile to the end profile part of the IPBDs they show a more pronounced view of their ambitions, elaborating on what they want in life and how this is connected to being a teacher, mainly employing *intentional discourse*. In the end profile these student teachers talk more about the notion that being a teacher also demands a continuous growth (*developmental discourse*) in the end profile. Student teachers that tell a goal-oriented story start their story from a point of awareness of personal qualities, aiming to find the tools and skills needed to put their personal strengths to use in the teacher education program.

The student teachers that present the second type of identity narration, here typified as '*explorative*' predominantly use *intentional discourse* in the start profile part of their IPBDs. These student teachers have a clear view of what is important to them in life, motivating their start of the teacher education programme because of a curious expectation about what being a teacher can mean to them. After presenting their investigative stance towards being a teacher these student teachers also turn towards personal and developmental discourse to discuss their development as a teacher. In the explorative narrations the non-fit discourse also appears, contrary to the goal-oriented narrations in which the non-fit discourse is not employed. The overall tone of the explorative identity narration in these IPBDs is somewhat more distant and

businesslike: student teachers use different perspectives to explore their suitability as teachers.

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this article is to develop more insight in the nature of the series of conversations student teachers have about the relation between different characteristics of oneself as a person and as a teacher. These conversations take place with themselves and with others. Developing a coherent teacher identity, here understood as a general and coherent understanding of those different characteristics, is considered crucial for student teachers to successfully enter and stay in the teaching profession (e.g., Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2008; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Paying attention to the development of teacher identity during teacher education also acknowledges the personal and emotional struggles that (beginning) teachers face when confronted with disparate personal and professional characteristics.

We have conceptualised the dialogical process, in which a student teacher makes sense of the different and changing ideas he or she has about oneself as a beginning teacher, as internally persuasive borderland discourse (IPBD).

Our study shows that the voice of significant others is distinctively present in the IPBD of student teachers. Many different voices of others appear in IPBDs: friends, former teachers, family members, peer students, pupils, school mentors, other colleagues in school and colleagues from other jobs. We found how those voices are freely used by student teachers to inform the conversations about themselves as teachers; all voices seemingly play an equal part in the discussion of different characteristics as a teacher. Words of others about being a teacher seem to be valued because of their impact on the dialogical testing that takes place in the IPBD. Student teachers individually decide which others are indeed significant for an internally persuasive discussion of disparate characteristics.

We found three ways in which the voices of others were used. As expected from research, cited in our theoretical framework, on the influence of significant others on the development and perseverance of beginning teachers (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Rots, 2010) we found that the voices of others were used for (1)'authorisation' and as (2)'markers of good teaching'. In the case of *authorisation* the voices of others are used to illustrate or prove statements about character strengths and skills. When explaining their ideals, their own *markers for being a good teacher*, student teachers refer to the things they hope pupils will say about them in the future and former teachers are often referred to when describing notions of ones' ideal teacher. What was not expected from current research was our finding that the voices of others appear also as the (3) 'embodiment of the nature of teaching'. The voices of others are used to discuss what is characteristic for teaching. Others, like colleagues, are seen to represent what is

attractive about the job for a student teacher. Besides that, others were used to describe what being a teacher demands of the student teacher, what challenges do or will occur when becoming a teacher. In these conversations for instance, pupils represent the doubts and challenges student teachers have. Their voice is used when student teachers, engaged in an internally persuasive dialogue, openly question their future as a teacher. The IPBDs analysed in this study show that student teachers allow their doubts and fears to be presented to the teacher educators in the portfolio texts that they write.

We found four dialogical strategies used by student teachers to discuss the question 'who am I as a teacher?', labelled by us respectively as (1) 'personal discourse', (2) 'intentional discourse', (3) 'developmental discourse' and (4) 'non-fit discourse'. So student teachers use different strategies to deal with the personal and emotional struggles they are confronted with when becoming a teacher. Though current literature has referred to the development of teacher identity as a process of struggle (e.g., Alsup, 2006, Beauchamp & Thomas, 2008; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004), the nature of this struggle has not been investigated in detail and hence, remained a black box. The process which takes place in this black box is mostly seen as an individual struggle, dependent on personal qualities and strengths like self-efficacy and feelings of self-worth (e.g. Beauchamp & Thomas, 2008). The dialogical strategies found in this study actually show *how* student teachers deal with disparate characteristics that appear during the struggle of becoming a teacher. Noteworthy is that we not only found different student teachers using different strategies in IPBD, but also that we found how one student teacher often uses several (mostly three or four) strategies in one IPBD. This in itself testifies to the process of exploration and identity formation that student teachers find themselves in during the teacher education programme.

The ways in which significant others play a role and the way in which different dialogical strategies are employed may inform researchers and teacher educators about how student teachers can be stimulated and supported when reflecting on their development as teachers. For example, student teachers could be stimulated to use different strategies to form dialogues about who they are as teachers, or to critically reflect on who are the significant others they take into account when thinking about teaching and about themselves as teachers.

Looking at the overall IPBDs of the student teachers and the set of dialogical strategies used, we found two types of narratives. One type can be referred to as a goal-oriented narrative, in which determined student teachers try to relate and integrate who they consider themselves to be with what is asked of them in the profession. The other narrative can be typified as an explorative narrative in which student teachers question what being a teacher has to offer and asks of them, discussing how this fits who they are and what is important to them. Both types of narratives testify how student teachers are putting efforts in developing a convincing image of themselves as teachers.

Two themes for further investigation on teacher education and teacher learning arise from this study. First, it is relevant to investigate how the different types of strategies and the different types of narratives contribute to a sense of coherence and resilience in teacher identity during teacher education and the induction phase. This is important as a sense of coherence is found to be related to successful entry and persistence in the teacher profession (Rots, 2010). Related to that, it is relevant to see to what extent beginning teachers stick to certain dialogical strategies and the narratives about themselves, also after teacher education.

A second theme for further research derives from the evidential importance of the voices of significant others in IPBDs. Whereas the concept of significant others in this and in other research has been employed as singular, it is relevant to understand better how there are many types of others that may or should be significant in different ways and extents. In the case of student teachers, one can wonder if some voices, for example the teacher educators, school mentors, pupils or even family and friends are or should be considered as more significant than others or the opposite, namely equally crucial and complementary in: a) characterizing a student teacher as a teacher, b) representing the nature of teaching or c) being a good teacher?

Research into both of these themes can contribute to understanding and conceptualizing the struggles so typical to the induction phase, yet on a practical level, can also reveal more information about how teacher educators can stimulate and support student teachers in developing a coherent teacher identity. By investigating how IPBD's are constructed, this study has made a first step in opening the black box of student teachers' identity struggle.

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