

***UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF CONFLICTS: A PILOT STUDY
OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT FACILITATION
DURING INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION***

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ABSTRACT. This research on student teachers' professional identity formulation contributes to the emerging development of utilizing dialogical approaches in teacher identity research. Following the conceptual framework and practical implications of Alsup (2006) and Hermans & Hermans-Konopka (2010), we developed support for professional identity development. The main aim of the support was to facilitate the negotiation and solving of tensions between student teachers' professional and personal I-positions. Data regarding the professional identity development support was collected by means of written assignments from 11 students from two teacher training curricula during school practicum seminars in one university in Estonia. A qualitative content analysis method was utilized by two researchers for analyzing written assignments (21). The results revealed that the developed support was functional for communicating tensions between conflicting positions and partly functional for solving tensions between positions. Implications for practice and further research are presented.

KEYWORDS: professional identity, identity development facilitation, initial teacher education

The study of teachers' work, learning, and development has changed considerably over the last twenty years as shown by Akkerman and Meijer (2011). In addition to focusing on teachers' acquisition of professional knowledge and skills and the development of appropriate attitudes, other characteristics that relate more to the personal characteristics of teachers have become increasingly important. Akkerman and Meijer (2011) point out that, in line with this trend, scholarly interest in teachers' perception of themselves as teachers has increased as well as interest in teachers' professional identity.

Relating to the above, several scholars of teacher education (see for example, REF; Beijaard, 1995; Kelchtermans, 2009; Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2005) have pointed out that student teachers need to explore their identity, given that teachers' sense of their professional identity manifests itself in job satisfaction, occupational commitment, self-efficacy, and changes in levels of motivation (Day, 2002). However, many authors

AUTHOR'S NOTE. This research was supported by the Estonian Science Foundation (No ETF9221) and the European Social Fund Programme Eduko (via the Archimedes Foundation).

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(e.g. Bohl & Van Zoest, 2002; Danielewicz, 2001, Grossman & McDonald, 2008) point out that in existing university programs student teachers are not sufficiently prepared to deal with their emerging professional selves. Alsup (2006) acknowledges that in many programs issues related to professional demeanor, dress, and communication are touched upon; however, what is neglected in her view are: “aspects of identity development that involve the integration of the personal self with the professional self, and the ‘taking on’ of a culturally scripted, often narrowly defined, professional role while maintaining individuality” (p. 4). As research shows (Alsup, 2006; Danielewicz, 2001), these shortcomings are related to the unsuccessful entrance of student teachers into the profession.

Several recent studies on teacher identity development (see e.g. Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013) have argued for dialogical perspectives when seeking to understand how the personal and professional selves are being negotiated in the course of becoming a professional. In this study, we wish to move closer to the practical concerns of teacher education and propose some elements of support to facilitate the negotiation of personal and professional positions in teacher education programs. In the following section we address this aim using the concepts of ‘internalization’ and ‘externalization’ which contribute to the construction of the personal culture of an individual, the theory of Dialogical Self, which in the current study makes it possible to focus on the result of person-institution dialogue at an intra-psychological level, and introduce the concepts of ‘meta-position’, ‘coalition of positions’ and ‘borderland discourse’ to help understand how personal and professional identity could be integrated in the course of teacher education.

Dialogical becoming within socio-cultural surroundings

Becoming professional always occurs within a socio-cultural context. Consistent with the socio-cultural perspective, the person-culture dialogue leads to the construction of (professional) identity through the use of cultural material. As the semiotic mediational perspective states, the social surroundings offer semiotically mediated cultural material that people borrow to create their personal cultures (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007). The exchange of semiotic materials between a person and the social environment that results in adaptation and creation of meanings can be explained with the constructive processes of internalization and externalization that are both involved in the reconstruction of the intra-psychological worlds (Valsiner, 2001). Internalization is a constructive process that enables one to take social (external) messages to the personal level contributing to the creation of personal meanings. Externalization is a process of the analysis of subjective materials during their transposition from the inside to the outside of the person and the modification of the external environment. Both of these processes are constantly in action and feed mutually into each other (ibid.)

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Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) helps to further understand how these systems (referred to as personal and social positions according to Dialogical Self theory; the professional is a type of social position) are coordinated at an intra-psychological level. According to this theory, the self is a system of relatively autonomous I-positions between which a self fluctuates. These I-positions have emerged through different historical, cultural, and institutional experiences and social relationships and are supplied with “voices”. The collection of features of a particular I-position can consist of very different and even conflicting voices towards the same issue caused by the manifold of agents that have evoked a particular I-position (see for example Akkerman, Admiraal, Simons, & Niessen, 2006). This means that a person does not fit into a ready-made role but rather different and conflicting voices cohere in a Self through their dialogical relations. Similarly, as it cannot be assumed that voices evoking a certain I-position are harmonic; different I-positions are not necessarily harmonic either.

In the acceptance of the multiple and discontinuous nature of identity, a question arises: “How can a multiple self still be experienced as a single and permanent person?” (Salgado & Hermans, 2005). To answer this question, Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) showed how personal continuity of self is assured by self-narration. Through dialogues within a self and with others, meaningful experiences are organized into one narrative structured system (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). Self-narration is possible owing to meta-positioning (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) in that an I leaves a specific position and even a variety of positions and observes them from the outside as an act of self-reflection. Taking a meta-position has three functions: unifying, executing, and liberating positions. In addition, “unity and multiplicity are also combined in a coalition of positions: positions do not work in isolation, but, as in a society, they can cooperate and support each other, leading to ‘conglomerations’ in the self that may dominate other positions” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 20). Such coalitions can be formed between personal positions but also between personal and social positions. Moreover, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, (2010) argue that “coalitions of conflicting or opposing positions have the potential of creating strong motivation that surpasses the interests of positions in their isolation. Such coalitions create forms of ‘integrative motivation’ emerging in a field of tension between centering and de-centering movements in the self” (ibid, p. 373). Such motivation is relevant to the development of individuals, teams, and organizations.

The above suggests that meta-positioning through self-reflection and the creation of coalitions between different positions should support the integration of personal and professional identity. This is similar to Alsup’s (2006) suggestion to create borderland discourses: “It is discourse that allows pre-service teachers to bring personal subjectivities or ideologies into the classroom and connect them to their developing professional selves” (p. 37). Similarly to Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010),

Alsop stresses the role of metacognition and critical consideration of the conflicting positions as a prerequisite for creating borderland discourses. Prior to forming such discourses, students experience tensions. Alsop found three types of tension in her study: tension between being a student at the university and a teacher at school; tension between personal convictions, skills, and professional role expectations; and tension between what is taught at university about teaching and learning and what is experienced at the practice school. Alsop pointed out that “the result of borderland discourse was neither the repudiation of one discourse nor the subsuming of one discourse into another; instead, the result was a new discourse with characteristics of both of the earlier ones as well as new characteristics unique to the pre-service teacher herself” (p. 37).

Drawing on the theoretical framework outlined above, we developed support seminars for student teachers enrolled in beginning teacher education programs that would facilitate: i) voicing of personal positions in the context of a highly prescribed professional context, ii) identifying tensions between personal and professional positions, and iii) solving tensions between different positions.

A pilot study was carried out to answer the following research questions: How functional were the developed elements of support for bringing out tensions between positions? Which tensions between positions did student teachers point out? How functional was the developed support for solving tension between conflicting positions? What characterizes the solutions created by student teachers?

Methods

Participants

Students from two teacher education curricula at a university in Estonia who had registered for the school practicum were invited to participate in the study. Data was collected from 5 students (all female; their ages were respectively 24, 26, two at 29, and 35) in the upper secondary school science education teacher curriculum (SE student teachers) and 6 students (all female; their ages were respectively five at 24, and 28) in the Estonian language and literature teacher curriculum (ELL student teachers). Ten students had no teaching experience prior to the study and one Estonian language and literature teacher curriculum student had less than a year of teaching experience. Participation in the study was voluntary; no incentives were provided to students for participation.

Support seminars

Following the theoretical framework outlined in the introduction section, we designed three seminars (each 1.5 hours) that aimed to activate inner dialogues between I-positions in order to open up potential for negotiation and development. Two rounds

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of seminars were carried out: a round among ELL student teachers and a round among SE student teachers, both at a university in Estonia. The first seminar focused entirely on the role of personal characteristics in teacher professional practice and aimed to facilitate student teachers in voicing their own personal qualities and strengths (concrete assignments shown in Table 1). The second and the third seminar focused on resolving tensions between personal features and professional role expectations. A specific assignment was designed to practice the formulation of coalitions between positions (see Table 1). After each assignment, a group debriefing took place, led by two facilitators.

Table 1. *Seminar theme and student assignments*

Seminar theme	Student Assignments
Seminar 1: The role of personal qualities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Think about your school practicum and pick out a teacher who stood out positively due to some features or characteristics personal to her/him. What were these features or characteristics? 2. Thinking about the pupils you met at the practice school, which personal qualities do you think a contemporary teacher should have to be a good teacher? 3. Thinking about your school practicum so far, which personal characteristics or features do you have that are useful in the teaching profession? Have you been able to utilize these qualities during the school practicum? Could you use these qualities even more? 4. Taking a wider view, what are your personal characteristics that have been revealed in situations outside the teaching profession (at home, sport training) that you could also make use of as a teacher?
Seminar 2: Solving tensions between positions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thinking about your colleagues or about discussions with colleagues, has the topic of tension between personal features and professional role expectations been raised? 2. Have you experienced tension or conflict between your personality or convictions and the role expectations set for teachers during the school practicum? <p style="margin-left: 20px;">For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I as a student at university vs. I as a teacher at the practice school - my personal convictions about teaching vs. principles taught at university - my convictions about teaching vs. principles that work at the practice school - pedagogical principles taught at university vs. principles that work at the practice school - I as a person vs. teacher role expectations 3. Please choose the tension that is most important for you for further analysis for a peer assignment. Please take an A4 blank sheet and divide it into three sections (25/25/50% of the page). First, elaborate on the two opposing positions and write clarifying explanations in the two smaller page sections (one position in each section). Second, discuss the positions in pairs and try to formulate a coalition between positions or a new situation that would meet the following criteria: i) the initial tension or conflict is resolved, and ii) one position does not dominate over the

other. You can think of this assignment as developing a coalition between two parties. Third, elaborate on the coalition on the remaining section of the page (50%).

Seminar 3: Solving tensions between positions	<p>1. Have you experienced tension or conflict between your personalities or conviction and role expectations set for teachers during the school practicum? (Use the same examples given as in assignment 2 in seminar 2.)</p> <p>2. Please choose the tension that is most important for you for further analysis for an individual assignment. <i>Students are asked to individually follow the same steps described in assignment 3 in seminar 2. If time permits, another round of assignments is carried out.</i></p>
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The seminars were spread over a ten-week period. This period was chosen because during that time student teachers would have carried out and completed their major school practicum (eight weeks). School practicum is considered to be very important in teacher training. Besides providing opportunities to develop skills needed in the profession, the practicum experience supports connecting theory and practice, advocates a better understanding of the professional domain, and helps to develop one's personality (Sgroi & Ryniker, 2002; Sweitzer & King, 2004). An increase in tensions between personal and professional positions initiated by the internalization process (Vygotsky, 1978) was expected because the school practicum acted as a new and challenging environment presenting new relations (formal and informal) and professional activities, which through personal experiences contribute to the construction of new meanings.

Data collection and analysis

Nineteen assignments were collected from student teachers during the second and third seminars. Some students communicated only one pair of positions that caused tension; others communicated several mismatches. The analysis procedure consisted of several steps. First, 45 tensions were identified based on the consensus of the two authors of this paper. Next, we carried out qualitative content analysis to distinguish different types of tension. The examples of the five tensions used in the assignments, which were developed based on Alsup (2006), were used as initial categories in the data analysis: 'I as a student at university' vs. 'I as a teacher at the practice school'; 'my personal convictions about teaching' vs. 'principles taught at university'; 'my convictions about teaching' vs. 'principles that work at the practice school'; 'pedagogical principles taught at university' vs. 'principles that work at the practice school'; 'I as a person vs. teacher role expectations'. In the course of initial coding, we found that regarding some tensions between convictions and school practice, it was not possible to distinguish whether a conviction was a student's personal conviction, taught at university, or of another origin, therefore we created a new category: 'expectations about teaching and learning' vs. 'principles that work at the practice school'. Moreover, one assignment did not contain any tensions related to the categories set out above. Instead, a student had listed some teacher role expectations and pointed out a dilemma

between using illustrative materials vs. developing the student's own imagination. We categorized this dilemma as a tension of pedagogical knowledge. We did not find any tensions that could be categorized as 'I as a student at university' vs. 'I as a teacher at the practice school' and 'my personal convictions about teaching' vs. 'principles taught at university'.

Next, 33 solutions to the tensions were analyzed by two researchers. We distinguished five categories of solutions. The 'coalition between positions' (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) and 'borderland discourse' (Alsup, 2006) described in the introduction section served as sensitizing concepts (Bowen, 2006) at this stage of the content analysis procedure. We assigned solutions to the category of 'coalition' when the following criteria were met: i) the tension between conflicting positions was not visible, ii) both positions were presented at the solution, and iii) a new perspective of development was visible in the answer. Regarding the borderland discourse, we followed Alsup's (2006) suggestion that teachers' emerging borderland discourse can be manifested in developing 'personal pedagogies'. Alsup (2006, p. 127) explained, "*The students in my study were, of course, new to the profession, so I did not yet see them enacting any systematic or political changes in the larger educational arena; however, some of them did begin to honor their selves, and be good teachers. This was a strong first step...*" Based on this observation we formulated a category 'dominance of personal positions in a solution' and assigned all solutions where conflicts between personal and professional positions were solved with a stronger manifestation of personal positions. As suggested by Alsup (2006), we consider this process as a first stage in formulating borderland discourse. Following this, in some solutions we could observe the dominance of internalized professional positions. In these solutions students had chosen the adoption of professional role expectations as a solution to the conflicts between personal and professional positions.

All three categories described above (coalition, personal position dominance, professional position dominance) indicated some internal negotiation and/or reformulations of self. By contrast, the fourth category consisted of solutions where student teachers explained how changing conditions external to the self (mainly the university program) would solve the tensions between the conflicting positions. Finally, two solutions that we could not assign to any of the categories described above were categorized as 'Other/Miscellaneous'. These were general comments offering limited information for further interpretation.

Results

Functionality of the developed support elements for bringing out tensions between positions

We used two criteria to evaluate the functionality of the developed support program (see assignments in seminar 2 and 3 in Table 1). First, we judged whether the seminars and written assignments specifically evoked the communication of tensions between positions. In this respect we found that 45 tensions were indicated in 19 assignments. This was more than we expected since students were asked to choose one meaningful tension in each assignment. However, as also described in the introduction section, we expected a high number of tensions between different positions because the school practicum acted as a new and challenging environment presenting new relations and professional activities, which through personal experiences contribute to the construction of new meanings.

Secondly, we looked at how extensively student teachers had described their tensions. In this respect we found that a few students merely listed the tensions without further explanation, while the vast majority was more explicit about them. In general, tension between principles taught at university and principles practiced at school was more frequently less elaborated than communications about the other two categories of tensions. Apparently, there were also differences between students; some students wrote extensively, while other students were straight to the point in their written responses. Based on the above, we suggest using this assignment in combination with an individual or group debriefing that would allow further elaboration on the written text. In brief, following these criteria, we consider the developed support program functional when used in combination with further individual or group debriefing.

Tensions between positions pointed out by student teachers

Table 2 (top of next page) summarizes all tensions found in student teachers' assignments. Below we will describe the three most often occurring tensions in more detail.

Tensions between personal and professional I- positions

Tensions in this category were communicated by all SE student teachers and by two ELL student teachers. Some student teachers pointed out aspects that they wished to develop in further themselves in order to meet teacher role expectations in a better way. For example, Lucie wished to gain deeper knowledge about her subject field to be able to answer student questions in a stronger way. Eva pointed out that she had problems with taking different student abilities into account, while a teacher should be able to do that and be patient with pupils. She also stated that she is not very talkative and creative while teachers need to have such qualities. The fourth tension Eva was concerned about was her dressing style and behavior in front of the class; she found that owing to the role expectations, she had to consider more carefully what to wear and how to behave given that she was an example for pupils. Other students stressed their personal features that they would like to retain as a teacher but that conflicted with the

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Table 2. *Tensions communicated by student teachers (N = 11) between different I-positions.*

Pseudo-nym	Subject	No*	Prsn vs. prof**	Expectations vs. practice***	University vs. practice ****	Knowledge dilemma	Total number of tensions
Lucie	E	2	2	4	2		8
Mary	E	2	1	1	5		7
Thea	E	1			3		3
Lisa	E	1			4		4
Ann	E	1			3		3
Laura	E	1			7		7
Kate	S	2	2			1	3
Eva	S	3	4				4
May	S	2	1	1			2
Sue	S	3	2		1		3
June	S	1	1				1
		19	13	6	25	1	45

*Number of assignments

** ‘I as a person’ vs. ‘teacher role expectations’

*** expectations about teaching and learning vs. principles practiced at practice school

**** ‘pedagogical principles taught at university’ vs. ‘principles that work at practice school

practice school routines or teacher role expectations. For example, Mary wrote: “I want to keep my distance”; however, “the pupils want to know more about my life, my personality. They search for information about me in Google, they want to know my age”. She also stressed that she would like to be friendly, and solve problems in a constructive way, while the pupils were used to more aggressive behavior from teachers and expected this from her as well. Very similar to the latter, June pointed out that she would like to be tolerant of people and situations and not too strict with the pupils. However, the role expectation is that a teacher is assertive and keeps good order and regulation in class. Moreover, Kate wrote that it was difficult to find a balance between being a friend with the pupils and being their teacher owing to the small age difference and similar interests she has with the older pupils. A different tension was pointed out by Sue, who was concerned about showing her personal opinions to pupils. She pointed out that she had developed an opinion about a teacher who had behaved strangely towards the pupils. However, she had had to hide this opinion carefully from the pupils. It was a difficult situation where she as a person would have wanted to take the pupils’ side and condemn the other teacher’s behavior, but because of the expected role she could not do that. In addition, Kate pointed out that it was very difficult to be oneself while a mentor teacher was constantly listening and following what she did with pupils. She felt that she was constantly being judged. Finally, Lucie indicated that although she ought to start to work as a teacher after graduation, she felt that she was unable to do that and perhaps she would find another job for herself. As we have shown, very

different dilemmas appeared in relation to being a person and being a teacher in this study.

Tensions between expectations and school practice

This category included tensions between student teachers' convictions and expectations related to teaching and learning and actual school situations. All three students who pointed out these tensions communicated different conflicts between expectations and reality that mostly related to asserting oneself as a teacher. Lucie, who pointed out four tensions in this category, wrote that she expected Estonian language and literature to be interesting, while her pupils considered it as one of the least interesting subjects. In the same vein, she pointed out that she expected that "a good working mode is present in classes, and that students wish to learn the subject", however, "pupils see school as a duty, are simply carrying themselves through lessons, school days". In the second assignment she pointed out a similar tension: while she expected pupils to listen to and conform to a teacher's wishes, the whole school culture seemed to tolerate loose rules and noise in classrooms. The fourth tension pointed out by Mary concerned her expectations of pupils respecting a teacher's time. She expected that appointments made by pupils would be kept; however, it turned out that the pupils believed teachers work 24/7 and that they should reply to e-mails late in the evening.

The issue of asserting was even more visible in Mary's tension. She wrote: "I wanted the pupils to take me seriously, that they would regard me as an *authority*", however

the pupils regard you as their peer, dare to make ambiguous jokes during lessons, just laugh and do not feel like working. After the lessons they open the doors for me, wish me a good day. They ask during the first lesson if I will start teaching them; they consider me as a new pupil.

Finally, May, who was somewhat different from the other student teachers as next to her teacher training, she is also enrolled in a PhD in Gene Technology, pointed out that education should be seen as a privilege. Accordingly, the organization of studies should be more strict and rigid, pupils should be graded more rigorously and they should not get so many opportunities for retests. Missing classes without serious reasons should also be punished in some way. However, at the practice school May thought that pupils missed many classes without any serious consequences, the organization of studies is generally lenient, and the pupils failed to submit their work on time.

Tensions between university and school practice

This was the most frequent category of tensions in our study. On the one hand, ELL student teachers communicated several aspects of the practicum that the teacher training program did not sufficiently prepare them for. For example, several students

pointed out that they would have wanted to have better knowledge and skills related to classroom management, enhancing pupils' study motivation, pupil activating teaching methods, and working with special needs students. One student pointed out that she wanted to have better knowledge about the subject field (Estonian language and literature). On the other hand, a few student teachers communicated mismatches between what was taught at university and what they experienced at the practice school. Some students criticized the fact that the teacher education program focused so much on subject content. For example, Lucie wrote: "The university expects me to be a subject matter expert, that I teach my subject well; however, the pupils expect me to be interesting and captivating, that lessons are not boring". Somewhat related, Mary pointed out: "In the Estonian language didactics course a new approach to teaching Estonian language was introduced, the course focused entirely on that approach; however, in the practice school the older approach is still used". Two ELL student teachers also pointed out a mismatch regarding resources. While at the university student teachers are encouraged to create different work sheets for their pupils, in the schools it was not possible for them to use the work sheets because the schools have very limited resources for making photocopies. A SE student teacher also pointed out a mismatch between what was taught at university and what she experienced at school. She was concerned about the pupils' learning: "Collaborative learning methods should be used because we are taught at university that different methods and alternative approaches to learning are very important. However, team work assignments take more time than a lecture and very often pupils do not learn anything substantial in the course of team work". In brief, this category was mainly expressed by ELL student teachers, and their main concern was their insufficient preparation in general pedagogy and subject didactics, and the university course focusing on subject content.

Characteristics of solutions created by student teachers

The analysis of the data revealed four main types of solutions: i) coalitions between the I-positions "I as a person" and "I as a teacher"; ii) dominance of a person in solutions; iii) dominance of role expectations in solutions; iv) changing conditions external to the self in a solution. The four categories are on different levels. The first three categories represent solutions related to internal negotiation and/or reorganization of the self. The last category contains solutions related to negotiation and/or reorganization of conditions external to the self (e.g. university teacher training program). Table 3 (top of next page) summarizes all solutions found in student teachers' assignments. Below we will describe each type of solution in more detail.

Table 3. *Solutions communicated by student teachers (N = 11) between different I-positions.*

Pseudonym	Subject	No*	Coalition	Personal domination**	Professional domination***	External conditions	Other	Total number of solutions
Lucie	E	2	1	2		1		4
Mary	E	2		2		3	1	6
Thea	E	1				3		3
Lisa	E	1				4		4
Ann	E	1				1		1
Laura	E	1				3		3
Kate	S	2				1	1	2
Eva	S	3	1		3			4
May	S	2	1	1				2
Sue	S	3	1	2				3
June	S	1	1					1
		19	5	7	3	16	2	33

*Number of assignments

** Domination of personal position in a solution

*** Domination of professional position in a solution

Coalitions between positions

Although student teachers were encouraged to formulate coalitions between conflicting positions, there were only five solutions that we considered as coalitions following the three criteria described in the data analysis section. Four of them were formed between opposing personal and professional positions and one of them was formed to solve a conflict between knowledge taught at the university and personal observations at a practice school. The latter was communicated by Sue who had questioned whether collaborative assignments are always suitable learning methods at school. Although her personal observation was that a collaborative assignment is very time consuming and results in limited student learning, she formed a coalition with the position that favors collaborative learning (taught in the university program). In her solution she pointed out additional conditions for using collaborative learning methods. "Collaborative work should be carried out in classes where it is a better fit and only when there is sufficient time for this". These additional conditions seemed to allow her to eliminate the initial tension between positions. Conditioning as a strategy was also observable in cases where student teachers had formulated coalitions between personal and professional tensions. May pointed out that her personal life experience had made her cautious about people with certain behavior and attitudes; this conflicted with the teacher role expectation that required trusting pupils and expecting the best of them even in cases where such views were not supported by the behavior and attitudes of pupils. In her solution, May pointed out that she needed to adopt the presumption of innocence, which states that she needs to give pupils the benefit of doubt and even

pupils with bad behavior need to get a chance. Subsequently, she clarified that she did not need to give such chances endlessly, and was not required to be open hearted with a pupil who clearly had bad intentions. Additional conditions that allowed a coalition were also clearly communicated by Lucie and June. Eva adopted another strategy: she had pointed out that she was not a very talkative person but as a teacher she had to talk a lot in class. In her solution she stated that she would come up with more assignments that pupils can carry out. In this solution the initial conflict between personal and role expectation was eliminated by a third action that seemed to allow her to maintain her personal character and carry out the teacher role.

Dominance of a person in solutions

In addition to the creation of coalitions, we identified other strategies applied to solve tensions student teachers experienced during pedagogical practice. We found that several students created a solution by presenting a dominance of personal features over environmental conditions and role expectations. As explained in the data analysis section, these instances could be considered the first steps towards creating ‘personal pedagogies’ and moving towards ‘borderland discourses’ (Alsup, 2006). For instance, Lucie reported: “If it is needed then a teacher establishes her personal rules, repeats them again and again and again. I maintain discipline in my class even if other teachers won’t do this. ... Students can trust me, but still, I am not their pal. A teacher is not at the same level; she is a guide. She supports them and is not too familiar with them”. Similarly, Mary also emphasized the importance of the application of personal convictions to a conflicting condition: “I make clear my principle that I share personal things only with my friends”. Moreover, regarding another tension, she stressed that it is important: “To make clear what your own rules are in order to maintain discipline, what the rules in the classroom are and what the consequences are if somebody doesn’t follow them”. In the same realm, May pointed out the importance of establishing rules in the classroom that conform to her personal convictions related to teaching and learning even if these do not conform to other teachers’ ideas. Finally, Sue expressed a tension between expressing own opinions about other colleagues in front of pupils. She had communicated that according to the social role expectation sharing personal opinions about other teachers with the pupils was not allowed. Remarkably, in her solution she writes: “It is necessary to act depending on the situation. It is important to remain honest and at the same time cause minimal harm to other people.” As shown, all these solutions focus on maintaining personal views in a highly prescribed social environment. A strategy that seems to facilitate this process is the derogation of their rules: student teachers point to certain conditions where these rules apply (e.g. their classroom) and note the limitations of these rules (e.g. depending on the situation). This is expected since by changing social practices one needs to partly adapt to them so that the change will be accepted within social practice (Alsup, 2006). Expressing

derogations, and the openness of rules might facilitate the negotiation of these rules within social practices.

Dominance of role expectations in solutions

Although the support seminars were designed to support forming ‘coalitions’ and ‘borderland discourses’ between conflicting professional and personal positions, one student put forth the implementation of professional role expectations as a solution in three different assignments. Although the application of all these strategies means to proceed from the expectations related to the representation of the professional role of a teacher, a distinction is that in the case of a dominance of role expectation, a student teacher is more clearly guided to find solutions through the changes of self embracing the correction of professional conduct, personal peculiarity, etc. to adjust to the role. For example, in one assignment Eva found that she talks too fast and thought that “I must monitor myself so that I don’t talk too fast”. In another assignment she questions whether she can express her personal dress style at school; regarding the role expectations, she noted she “should be a role model for pupils” because “a teacher must dress and look exemplary”. Her solution contained an idea to change her professional conduct “In one’s free time one can express individuality. You can also do it as a teacher, but I need to control myself”. Similarly, in the third assignment, she saw a solution in the application of professional role expectation that ought to result in a change in her professional conduct. These examples reveal that entering the professional role and adjusting to the role were coordinated by the use of semiotic regulators. Tension that arose from conflicting relations between I-positions - “I as myself” and “I as a teacher” - were eliminated using moral semantic regulators such as “must”: “I must be more patient...I must pay attention to pupils who are afraid to ask questions...” This was one of the options for internalizing the social (professional) role that was identified in Eva’s reports, and it illustrates the influence of professional role expectations on the reorganization of self that accompanies professional identity construction (Kullasepp, 2011).

Changing conditions

As pointed out in the data analysis section, this type of solution shifts attention to the differences between the target of the changes when adjusting to the professional role. When taking the target of the changes as the basis of the analysis, two main methods for eliminating tension emerged in the participants’ assignments: i) the student herself was expected to go through changes (dominance of person, dominance of role, forming coalition), and ii) the changes expected were related to others, for instance, modification of teaching conditions - in other words, external conditions. This category included solutions to conflicts between what student teachers experienced at the practice school and what they were taught during the university teacher training

program. This type of solution was mainly communicated by ELL student teachers. For example, Ann saw a solution to problems with classroom management in making changes to the teacher education program: “Social pedagogues could talk about discipline problems”, Thea mentioned that “A lot can be solved with the help of practicing teachers. A special course is needed”. Similar to the above two examples, other students pointed out a number of courses that should be redesigned in teacher education programs to better prepare student teachers for the school practicum. Lucie, who was very critical of several aspects of the university teacher training program, made a more general comment in her solution: “Composers of curricula and study materials who sit in silent offices should face reality!”. While trying to interpret the presentation of this type of solution, we wish to point out two aspects. First, as described earlier, ELL student teachers pointed out several tensions between what was taught at the university and what they experienced at the practice school. Several students pointed to the way the program focused on subject content and called for further attention in general pedagogy. Extensive communication of these kinds of problems can refer to actual shortcomings in the training program. However, communication of this type of solution can also be viewed from another angle. Following on from this, student teachers might have felt difficulties solving the tensions themselves, and therefore, might have looked for external solutions such as making changes to the university program. Lucie, for example, who communicated several tensions between convictions about education and practices in schools, chose to solve the tensions with a personal orientation and communicated personal features in her solutions. Similarly, Mary, another ELL student teacher, decided to solve the tension between convictions and school practice by establishing a personal orientation. These students chose personal orientation instead of making suggestions for the university teacher training program on how to better prepare them as teachers. This could suggest that other students might not have been sufficiently supported to solve meaningful conflicts between positions themselves. We return to this assumption in the discussion section.

Functionality of the support structure developed for identifying solutions between conflicting positions

Similar to evaluating the functionality of the support seminars in terms of bringing out tensions between positions, we also looked at the number of solutions and their quality to consider the functionality of the support seminars in terms of creating solutions between positions. Student teachers formulated 33 solutions in 19 different assignments. Although the number of solutions was lower than the communication of tensions, we can consider this amount sufficient since student teachers were encouraged to resolve the tensions that were the most meaningful for them and all 19 assignments included at least one solution for conflicting positions.

After this, we reflected on the quality of the solutions. More than one third of the solutions dealt with developing a coalition between positions or formulating a personal pedagogy (associated with developing a borderland discourse, coded as the dominance of a personal position in a solution). These categories of solutions represent the successful negotiation of different positions and were initiated in assignments. Considerable presentation of such solutions would make it possible to suggest that the developed support seminars was functional to some extent. However, we also observed that nearly half of the tensions were not solved through the self. These solutions pointed to external conditions (often to courses in university programs) that need to be changed in order to overcome the tension between the conflicting positions. Based on these findings we conclude that the developed support seminars were partly functional and need to be developed further. Forming coalitions or personal pedagogies through oneself seems to be complicated in the setting of formal education and needs to be supported to a greater degree. Some strategies for advancing the developed support, by means of guiding student teachers to solve tensions themselves, will be presented in the discussion section.

Discussion

The current article contributes to recent trends in teacher identity research (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013; Leijen, Kullasepp, & Agan, 2010) and moves to the practical concerns of teacher education by proposing some support for facilitating negotiation of personal and professional positions in teacher education programs. Drawing on concepts of ‘meta-position’, ‘coalition of positions’ and ‘borderland discourse’, support seminars were designed that aimed to facilitate student teachers’ negotiation of different and conflicting personal and professional positions in the course of teacher education. Below, we discuss the main findings of the empirical study.

First, an increase in tensions between personal and professional positions, initiated by the internalization process (Vygotsky, 1978), were expected because the school practicum acted as a new and challenging environment. This assumption was supported by extensive communication of tensions and allowed us to consider the developed support seminars functional when written assignments are used in combination with individual or group debriefing that would allow further elaboration on the written text. While considering the content of the tensions, we found that students communicated tensions between i) personal characteristics and professional role expectations, ii) expectations about teaching and learning and principles practiced at the practice school, and iii) pedagogical principles taught at the university and the principles that work at the practice school. Although there was some indication that the tensions in the latter category were less elaborated and could relate to the surface layers of professional identity development, further research is needed to explore the function

and meaningfulness of different types of tensions in the process of professional identity development.

Second, we considered the developed support partly functional for solving tensions between conflicting positions. Nearly one third of the solutions contained a formulation of a coalition between positions, or established a personal orientation to solve the tensions, as encouraged by the assignments. We found that forming coalitions or personal pedagogies oneself seems to be complicated in the setting of formal education and needs to be supported to a greater degree. Based on these findings we suggest that the developed support seminars could benefit from additional reflection activities to support the process of ‘meta-positioning’ (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), as that reflection allows the creation of knowledge about one’s own cognition and the regulation of that cognition (Simons, 1994). A useful framework for guiding reflection is the “onion model” developed based on the typology of Gregory Bateson (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). The onion model contains six levels, which can influence the functioning of a person. These levels are: the environment that refers to everything that is outside of the person; behavior that refers to a person’s behavior (both effective and ineffective); competencies that include different competences of a person; beliefs that include a person’s different beliefs; identity that refers to a person’s self-understanding; and, mission that refers to the callings and inspirations of a person. Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) distinguish between two concepts: reflection and core reflection. When reflection extends to the two deepest levels in the onion model, it is referred to as core reflection. A characteristic of core reflection is the attention to core qualities in people (e.g. empathy, compassion, love and flexibility, courage, creativity, sensitivity, decisiveness, and spontaneity). Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) present a detailed overview of different strategies mentors need to implement to support their students’ successful passage through different phases of reflection. We suggest that a consciousness of core qualities could help beginner teachers to formulate ‘personal pedagogies’ (Alsup, 2006), and therefore, better handle critical situations. In brief, we suggest advancing the developed support by adding activities promoting guided core reflection as suggested by Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) and explored by Sööt and Leijen (2012). Further research should investigate whether the additions to the professional identity facilitation support seminars would help to increase the formulation of ‘personal pedagogies’ (Alsup, 2006) and ‘coalitions’ (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) between conflicting personal and professional I-positions.

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