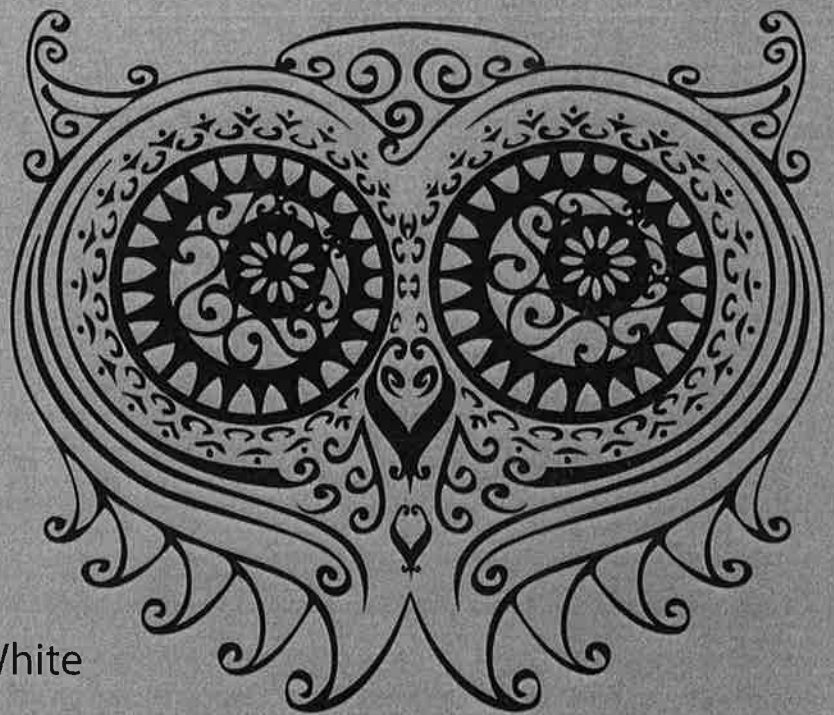


DEVELOPING OUTSTANDING  
**PRACTICE IN**  
SCHOOL-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION

Series Editor: Ian Menter

Critical Guides for  
Teacher Educators



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## CHAPTER 8 | WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE SHIFT TOWARDS A MORE SCHOOL-CENTRED MODEL IN THE NETHERLANDS?

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### CRITICAL ISSUES

- *Teacher education at school: who are the teacher educators?*
- *How do school–university partnerships facilitate learning opportunities for student teachers?*
- *How a work-based pedagogy in teacher education might look.*
- *Changing roles of teachers educators in school.*

## Being a teacher educator in the Netherlands: a short overview

In the Netherlands several routes are open to those who want to become a teacher.

### Case study

On completion of secondary education students can study at a university of applied sciences to become a teacher in primary or lower secondary (general and vocational) education through a four-year course. Subject knowledge and teaching knowledge are at the core of the curriculum.

To teach in higher secondary and pre-university education students must initially achieve a master's degree in a research university, following which they can enrol in a one-year post university course especially aimed at teaching aspects related to their subject. Students with a Bachelor's degree can apply for a master's course at a university of applied sciences and after graduation can teach in upper secondary education.

These routes share an important characteristic: the education of the student teacher is firmly founded in a TEI (either at a research university or a university of applied sciences) and in school experience. All routes can be characterised as practical and school-based, meaning the concerns, problems and dilemmas of school teachers are at the core of the curriculum and school experience plays an important role in teacher education. Korthagen and his colleagues (Korthagen et al, 2001) named this *realistic teacher education*. As a

they are guiding student teachers (van Velzen 2013). IBTEs work alongside SBTEs in schools on a regular but not full-time basis.

### **Critical question**

- » What challenges do your teachers face when taking on the role of teacher educator?

## **The roles of teacher educators in school**

In school-university partnerships the school policy enables student teachers to experience being part of the school community as 'colleagues' rather than guests. They are able increasingly to participate in some of the practices, which is seen as legitimate peripheral participation in the social practice of the school (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Ragonis and Hazzan, 2009). Cooperating teachers provide guidance to support the student teachers and facilitate opportunities to observe in the classroom. An important prerequisite at school level to realise this peripherality is the 'safety net' built by the school to avoid putting pupil learning at risk.

Another aspect of the work of cooperating teachers is opening up the social context of the school for their novice colleagues. Student teachers are not only introduced to school life but they are entitled to participate in all teaching and teacher-related activities, supported by the SBTE and the mentor. For instance:

- » they attend staff meetings about grading pupils or new teaching techniques;
- » assessments are prepared together;
- » the regular talks with parents about individual pupils are observed;
- » student teachers are also involved in all extra-curricular activities like school camps, parties and even redesigning the teaching spaces.

The most important aspect, however, is the daily guidance of learning how to act and think as a teacher, working with pupils and the school curriculum. This being work-based learning, different pedagogical approaches are required than those used at the institute.

Three important features of a pedagogy of work-based teacher education can be identified, based on the ideas of Billett (2001):

1. the affordance (or invitational quality) of the school, which is facilitated by seeing student teachers as colleagues, opening up all teaching activities for student teachers and having a clear policy for initial teacher education;
2. the agency of student teachers; that is, their individual abilities and willingness to participate in school and to be supervised;
3. structure aimed at integrating theory and practice:

- a. during actual teaching, to support the student teacher in learning to think and act as a teacher in a particular context;
- b. after teaching, or other school experience, to aid the student teacher in rethinking knowledge needed to act in new situations and other contexts.

To achieve the above, in partner schools support is given by the SBTE and/or the mentor depending on the kind of activities. Of course it is important to remember that working this way is rather new for all the stakeholders. In practice the stories are sometimes less attractive. In the example, based on the research of Timmermans (2012), we show that the affordance of these partner schools is still based on the individual decisions of mentors instead of on shared views regarding the education of student teachers. Consequently, the extent of peripheral participation in teacher-related activities varies.

### **The affordance of partner schools in primary teacher education**

Four types of activities are available for student teachers at school:

1. activities with or for pupils; for example planning, teaching and assessment;
2. activities at school level; for example communicating with parents, colleagues and other professionals;
3. accessibility and use of school-based resources; for example pupil files, school data, intranet and staff library.
4. activities aimed at teacher professional development; for example staff professional learning opportunities and feedback talks with the mentor.

Individual mentors, even within schools, differed considerably in which activities they asked of student teachers, which activities they allowed them to do and which activities were not available.

Research showed that:

- » most activities were related to working with pupils and the use of school-based resources;
- » more activities were allowed during the final year in which student teachers were enrolled in the teacher education course, probably based on ideas and convictions of mentors derived from their traditional practical experience;
- » overall student teachers did not get the opportunity to practise all activities because not all possible activities were afforded or allowed over the four years of study;
- » in the first three years most activities were voluntary. In the last year activities became mandatory, expecting the students to perform as teachers already;

- » there was no sign that mentors provided activities related to the learning needs of the individual student teachers;
- » the implicit ideas of individual mentors determined the work-based curriculum of the student teachers, instead of the content and rhythm of the work itself, which is characteristic for work-based learning.

(Timmermans, 2012)

### Critical question

- » What learning opportunities do your partner schools really afford to your student teachers?

## Mentors: teacher educators modelling their teaching

All Dutch student teachers are supervised by a mentor in daily practice, although in different ways and with different aims. Mentors provide their student teachers with opportunities to experience teaching and support them emotionally in the process of learning to know what it means to become a teacher and to develop the self-esteem needed.

The practical knowledge of the experienced teachers acting as mentors '*encapsulates the essence of being an accomplished practitioner*' (Loughran, 2010, p ix). Deconstructing this knowledge and sharing it with student teachers is seen as important because it can:

- » prevent each individual student teacher from feeling pressured to '*reinvent the wheel*' (Loughran, 2010);
- » help to overcome the limitations of learning through observation alone (Lortie, 1975);
- » be a tool for learning and instructional decision-making (Little, 2007);
- » contribute to student teachers becoming knowledgeable professionals (Thiessen, 2000).

Making practical knowledge explicit is not easy, so the collaborative mentoring approach (below) was developed to help mentor teachers (a) to show experienced teacher behaviour and critically discuss this with student teachers (a process we called work-based modelling) and (b) to support the student teacher during actual teaching (by modelling – mentor behaving as teacher, and scaffolding – mentor behaving as a teacher educator).

## The collaborative mentoring approach

This approach consists of cycles of lessons that are collaboratively prepared and evaluated by a student teacher and a mentor. The focus of discussions is the learning needs of the student teacher, but of course other issues can be discussed. The first lesson in the cycle

is taught by the mentor. They model experienced teacher behaviour relevant to the learning needs of the student teacher. If, for example, the student teacher's focus is related to motivating the pupils, the mentor demonstrates this as clearly as possible. The third lesson will be taught by the student teacher, employing this teaching strategy, while the second lesson is co-taught by both teachers. Co-teaching means they are not just dividing tasks but each is responsible for the whole lesson (Roth and Tobin, 2002). Before the actual teaching starts agreements are made about signs teachers can give to each other when the student teacher wants help or the mentor wants to provide support. By intervening the mentor can address pupils and complete student teachers' statements or ask additional questions. In the interventions the mentor takes the teacher role (modelling) and the student teacher observes. The student teacher can then imitate the behaviour of the mentor, exploring whether this behaviour also works for them. If a lesson stalls, the mentor can step in and provide the student teacher with (whispered) hints and brief suggestions (scaffolding). Subsequently the student teacher continues the lesson.

### **Modelling and scaffolding practical knowledge**

Mentoring conversations about modelling and scaffolding practical knowledge may include:

- » telling about teacher behaviour or ideas;
- » explaining one's own behaviour or ideas;
- » discussing the effectiveness of lesson plans;
- » discussing observations of lesson enactment by the mentor or student teacher;
- » discussing alternatives: reframing the situation and/or teachers' behaviour;
- » providing suggestions and discussing the expected effectiveness of these;
- » asking student teachers' suggestions and discussing the expected effectiveness of these;
- » giving feedback underpinned with vocational expertise;
- » comparing and discussing reflections written by the student teacher and the mentor.

Ways of modelling and scaffolding practical knowledge while teaching a co-taught lesson include:

- » demonstrating experienced teaching behaviour by the mentor;
- » stepping in, taking a teacher's role, and showing experienced teacher behaviour, which the student teacher observes and may imitate (modelling);
- » stepping in, taking a teacher educator's role, and making short statements or leading brief discussion on how to continue a lesson (scaffolding).

(Van Velzen, 2013)

Depending on the needs of the student teacher more than one lesson can be taught by the mentor or can be co-taught. At the same time the student teacher may have their own classes to teach where they continue to develop new teaching strategies. One can understand it is not an easy task for mentors to make the transition between the roles of teacher and teacher educator. Finding the right way (either as a teacher or as a teacher educator) and the right moment to intervene is one of the challenges mentors have to face.

Last, but not least, cooperating teachers should support student teachers while performing practical inquiries related to the improvement of their practice. All student teachers must perform such inquiries in their schools. Usually IBTEs provide this support; however, in partner schools this is a new role for cooperating teachers. Practical inquiry in these schools is not only a learning strategy for student teachers but also an important tool for school development. At the moment this role is seen as challenging and in most schools only a few teachers are able and willing to provide this support; alongside their student teachers they are pioneers in school-based inquiry. In Chapter 4 (Roberts) there are practical ideas to support teacher educators in undertaking this extended role.

Providing social and emotional support and the development of self-esteem, sharing practical knowledge and performing practical inquiries are the three important facets of mentoring student teachers (Wang and Odell, 2002). Each of them places unique demands on the mentors, and choosing when a specific approach is required is an important aspect of their professionalism.

### **Critical questions**

- » How are you enabling your mentors to develop their pedagogical approaches?
- » Are you fully utilising the opportunities that exist for work-based learning in your context?

### **IN A NUTSHELL**

The assumption that student teachers must be educated at schools and at TEIs and that schools and universities must collaborate in order to provide student teachers with the best from both worlds underpins school-university partnerships. In practice, however, this is not always easy to realise. The learning opportunities that are needed for educating student teachers are broadly acknowledged within partner schools although they are not always recognisable in daily practice. SBTEs are frequently in contact with their colleagues at the institute and, more specifically, with the IBTE placed at school. As an outcome of this collaboration these school mentors are less isolated than those in more traditional school contexts. Clearer leadership by the school management, however, would be helpful, as shown in the example of Timmermans (2012).

## REFLECTIONS ON **CRITICAL ISSUES**

- *As a result of the growing responsibility of schools for the education of student teachers we need a work-based pedagogy.*
- *The guidance that cooperating mentors provide is an important aspect of such pedagogy.*
- *The acknowledgement of mentors being teacher educators in actual practice is still somewhat controversial even among mentors themselves. Emotional support and supporting self-esteem is a well-known aspect of a pedagogy of work-based teacher education, but sharing practical knowledge, co-teaching and intervening in the lesson enactment of the student teacher is less known, though seen as important and helpful.*
- *New learning arrangements (both formal and at the workplace) have to be developed for mentors in order to support the expansion of the competences needed.*
- *Supervising practical inquiries is seen as even more difficult. It is helpful when teachers themselves start to systematically question their own practice, but until now this is not standard practice.*
- *At the moment, a lot of cooperating mentors do not experience these activities as 'teacher educator' or 'researcher' as part of their profession, let alone of their identity. Becoming second-order teachers in a first-order context indeed is hard, and changing these convictions is one of the most important challenges in work-based teacher education we have to face right now.*