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Self-Directed Teacher Education in the Netherlands: An Analysis of Interviews with Student Teachers and Their Coaches

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1. Experience-Based Approach of Teacher Education in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, initial teacher education is provided in two streams. One is a four-year bachelor program at University of Applied Sciences (Hogeschool or HBO) and the other is a one-year postgraduate program at Teacher Training Institute of Research University. Both curriculums emphasize student teachers' experiences and reflections. Half of the program is assigned to practicums, with students expected to gain experience in placement schools, supplemented by theoretical pedagogy and methodology lectures. The Dutch teacher education curriculum has a strong experience-based approach, integrating theory and practice through continuous activities and reflections. The development of reflection skills is formalized in the assessment criteria required for qualification.

This trend originated in the philosophical work of Dewey (1938) and was furthered by the influential studies of Schön (1983) and Kolb (1984). The stream of self-directed teacher education prevailed through the work of Korthagen (1985), Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, and Wubbels (2001), and Loughran (2006), and was embedded in an experience-based approach to professional development. Korthagen et al. (2001) called his approach the realistic approach, emphasizing the importance of learners' experience. He insisted that abstract scientific knowledge (Theory with capital T, called *episteme*) is not real in itself and needs to be rooted in practical wisdom (theory with small t, called *phronesis*) through teaching experience. He proposed a reflection model (ALACT) to improve the quality of reflection and encourage student teachers to discover essential aspects from their experiences by conducting multi-level reflections including deeper layers such as identity or mission (i.e., core reflection). Core reflection brought about the third perspective, which is the "person." Student teachers themselves are the agents for connecting practice and theory. In this regard, Korthagen (2017) stated: "Crucial is that such an approach builds on the concerns and gestalts of the teacher, and not on a pre-conceived idea of what this teacher should learn" (p.399).

Loughran (2006) focused on developing a pedagogy of teacher education, which was explained that "the relationship between teaching and learning in the programs and practices of learning *and* teaching about teaching might be purposefully examined, described, articulated and portrayed in ways that enhance our understanding of this complex interplay" (p.3). This statement expresses the general policy that teacher education is process-oriented. The roles of coaches are more than displaying desirable teaching behavior, or about providing decontextualized knowledge of tips and tricks. Student teachers need to be assisted in verbalizing the meaning of their experiences with the intentional support of their coaches. Such reflective activities with coaches and peers are regularly conducted in placement schools and universities in the Netherlands.

The student teachers' reflections tend to focus on negative aspects from which they identify problems and solutions that could be demotivating. To cope with such an imbalance, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) called the goodness of student teachers "core quality" and encouraged them to pay more attention to their strengths.

It is essential to explore what is helpful from the student teachers' perspectives. If student teachers are unaware of their experiences and their reflections' potential value, a self-directed approach would be more difficult from a motivational perspective. They need to

feel they are learning effectively from their experiences and feedback from coaches. However, a study by Geursen, an institute-based teacher educator, reported that her four student teachers mentioned their starting point to be Theory (capital T) and not practice. They considered the literature they read and examples of good practice they studied to be more influential than the feedback of school-based teacher educators (Geursen, de Heer, Korthagen, Lunenberg, & Zwart, 2010, p.294). This shows that the student teachers appreciate the eminent theory and exemplary practice. Loughran (2006) pointed out that "their [student teachers'] decisions about how to act in the future are about how to do it "correctly" as they seek a path through which to link their experiences to construct *the* way of acting" (p.41). However, the reality of teaching is much more dynamic, complex and holistic. Even experienced teachers are hardly always ready for the "correct" procedures, often struggling with dilemmas in various situations. It is essential to be aware of the on the spot thinking and pedagogical reasoning that underpins practice. Teacher educators used modeling to assist student teachers in understanding the thinking behind observable behaviors (e.g., Loughran & Berry, 2005; Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen, 2007).

In practicums, feedback questions and coaches' comments are essential measures to elicit student teachers' reflective thinking. Randall and Thornton (2001), associating with the original work of Heron (1990), described the features of different types of interventions in the context of supervisory conferences[1)]. Nekoda (2020) used this framework to analyze dialogues between student teachers and coaches and concluded that student teachers were more actively involved in dialogues when facilitative interventions preceded or were combined with authoritative ones. The coaches familiar with the realistic approach were often experienced university educators and intervened less prescriptively. Instead, they used catalytic interventions, typically conducted by why-questions, verbalizing the thinking preceding practice.

Typical roles exist for school- and institute-based teacher educators to support useful reflection, but there is a need to explore role-sharing for different positions. Traditionally, institute-based educators provided abstract scientific knowledge and school-based educators practical insight. Student teachers were expected to integrate the two without receiving instructions. How can we improve support for student teachers?

Lunenberg, Dengerink, and Korthagen (2014) and Dengerink, Lunenberg, and Korthagen (2015) identified the six roles of a teacher educator (i.e., teacher of teachers, researcher, coach, curriculum developer, gatekeeper (responsible for admission to the teaching profession), and broker (responsible for the connection between school and teacher education institute). This study focuses on the coaching role of educators to facilitate the student teachers' reflections in practicums. Thus, the term "coaches" focuses on their facilitative role, and "teacher educators" refer to their job status.

2. Method

2.1 Research Questions

This paper is a follow-up study by Nekoda (2020). It aims to describe self-directed teacher education in the Netherlands using interviews with student teachers and their coaches. The aim is to understand their views and explore practical ways of instruction and feedback in practicums. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to focus on the main themes, allowing interviewees to link their responses to related issues. The questions given to the coaches were as follows:

Q1. Please describe the policy of coaching student teachers. What do you emphasize/value when you coach them?
Q2. What kind of comments or questions do you give your student teachers to elicit their reflection?
Q3. Have you applied any interventions to elicit your student teachers' reflection on the level of identity? How do you support them to be aware of their core qualities and apply them to their lessons?

The prepared questions given to student teachers were as follows:

Q1. Please describe the main problems you faced and the influential comments or questions you received from your coach.
Q2. Please compare your teaching behavior in the beginning and now. Describe the progress you have made based on your experience.
Q3. Did you reflect on the level of identity? How did it work for your progress?

The common themes of prepared questions for coaches and student teachers were about measures of intervention and core reflection. In addition, coaches were asked about their coaching policy, and student teachers were asked about the problems they faced and the progress they observe in practicums.

2.2 Participants and Data Collection

In March 2018 and March 2019, the author visited primary and secondary schools in the Netherlands to collect data. The contents and methods of data collection are accredited by the Research Ethics Committee of Yamaguchi University. The author asked the participants to sign the consent form after explaining the research aim and how the collected data would be managed. Sixteen coaches working as teacher educators at schools or university and fifteen student teachers, who major or sub-major in English, agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted in oral and/or written format. Oral interviews were voice recorded and transcribed. The texts presented in this paper were modified for readability without changing the meaning of responses. Words are added in brackets for the same reason. The results are discussed in narrative form with excerpts of responses from student teachers and their coaches.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Coaches

3.1.1 Goal-Oriented and Individualized Teacher Education

The SBL competency list, advocated in 2006 by the Association for the Professional Quality of Teachers, consists of seven domains[2)] and describes professional skills with behavioral indicators of competent teachers. The explicit description of achievement levels enables coaches to develop consistent instructions for their students.

> Due to this structure, student's attributes, skills and knowledge needed to be at the required level and reflect the interaction with the children. This would be observed and qualified by the school- and institute-based teacher educator visiting students during the internship. The only attributes missing from the lists are levels of dedication or commitment. The willingness to embrace the whole process and challenge self-image, visions, strengths, and weaknesses are left implicit. My emphasis is on the link between the students' personality and commitment and teacher training expectations.
>
> (Institute-based teacher educator)

This comment points to the importance of supporting the reflective process in which student teachers pose questions and discover their strengths while thinking about how they want to be teachers. Although the behavioral indicators indicate the goals to be achieved, how to achieve it could differ depending on personality and commitment. Some coaches mentioned that setting personal/individual goals based on SBL competencies is crucial to monitoring and ensuring measured development. During the interviews, some typical questions were:

- How did you verify your goals? Did you prepare questions to ensure you have reached your goals in class?
- Did you discuss your goals with your mentor [school-based teacher educator]?
- What goals have you reached? Will you adjust them soon?
- What will be your next goal? What will you focus on in the coming weeks?

SBL competencies function as a standardized guideline for the curriculum but simultaneously promote individualization of development by including reflection skills for official qualification, which is necessary for autonomous and continuous development of a teaching career.

3.1.2 Modeling for Critical Thinking

In the context of self-directed teacher education, ensuring student teachers' learning ownership is a crucial part of coaching. However, in most cases, student teachers start their internship with anxiety and feel insecure about maintaining their learning ownership. As a result, they often pay more attention to the coaches' visible behavior and not decision-making. To cope with this tendency, one of the coaches emphasized the importance of modeling.

> I am a firm believer in modeling, so when I teach my classes, I try to practice what I preach. An

example: If the week's topic is "lesson plan," I design a "perfect" lesson plan, including lengthy descriptions of the situation at the start, goals, intended outcomes, procedures and activities on how to get there, justifying decisions based on the literature the students had to read. Upon completing the lesson, I ask students to compare my lesson plan with the actual lesson and indicate discrepancies. I want them to discuss the following question: What could have caused me to change the plan? Why does that happen? Does that never/often/always happen? I expect them to look critically at my written work and actual practice.

(Institute-based teacher educator)

This comment's fundamental point is that modeling is intended to focus on the decision-making rather than contents and teaching behavior. Model lessons do not show how student teachers should behave in class, but it provides them with opportunities to explore how discrepancies occur in the complex teaching process, which goes beyond what is written in the lesson plan.

Student teachers find great comfort in knowing that teacher educators experience the same teaching difficulties that they in practicum. This encourages them to understand on the spot decision-making, which is rarely articulated, confronted, and examined. Therefore, teacher educators need to be confident and able to display the vulnerability of focusing on dilemmas, puzzles, issues, and concerns that comprise teaching (Loughran, 2006, pp.41-42).

3.1.3 Verbalizing Student Teachers' Experience

Many coaches, familiar with Korthagen's approach, stated that they attempted to help student teachers take control of their teaching, reflection, dilemmas, and choices for improvement by themselves. The following comment represents the general policy of many coaches.

I try to make them aware of their contribution to the educational process, suggest alternatives, and elaborate on their teaching activities and pedagogical choices. My first question is always, "How does the lesson I have just observed relate to your teaching in the past few weeks/months?" I ask them to explain their thinking behind their planning and teaching, and how their thinking might have changed during their teaching.

(Institute-based teacher educator)

However, some coaches indicated that the reflection-based approach, characterized by catalytic intervention, is often challenging to execute in limited time, with a possible adverse effect when student teachers needed more direct feedback.

I am trying to make them think for themselves, but I sometimes feel that I need to state what they should or should not have done directly. With more time, you could say, "How do you think the class went?" but when you ask, you have already formed an opinion in your mind, so they think, "Come on, just tell me!"

(School-based teacher educator)

This comment poses an essential question for discussion. Do coaches need to have the answers in mind when they ask questions? One of the coaches who undertook a training course described his policy as follows:

I have taken different coaching courses, and I found it helpful to leave my judgment at the door. I do not have an opinion. I mean, I am only human, so it does not work all the time. I try to discuss different perspectives like pupils' feelings and the feelings of the student teachers themselves. Then, I try to select at least one situation that I want to analyze in detail.

(School-based teacher educator)

This coach spoke of the importance of being free from judgment at the beginning of after-class supervisory conferences. He tries to avoid creating an advice list and, instead, seek to create a situation to analyze through a discussion with the student teacher. Such an attitude would be essential for coaches who support student teachers' deep reflection. If coaches always had the "answers," the questions are reduced to knowledge quizzes with student teachers thinking the coaches merely test them. If time is limited, coaches would have to use more prescriptive interventions, but still need to organize the dialogues in combination with facilitative interventions, and explore what should be provided directly to student teachers, and when.

3.1.4 Keeping a Good Distance

The social power balance between student teachers and coaches influences how they respond to their coaches' comments or questions. Facilitative interventions that support the student teachers' reflective thinking do not function well if they feel overwhelmed or insecure when talking with their coaches. The following comment shows that coaches may intentionally need to keep a distance from student teachers when they become aware that their proximity prevents student teachers from taking ownership of the learning process.

> I want her to feel free to say what she wants. She disagrees with me half the time, which is fine, which means we can have a good conversation. Otherwise, I took a bit of distance from her because she started doing things in the way I wanted things done, not how it worked. So she was giving me answers that she thought would please me. We work closely together now, which means there is a conflict of interest here. I had to step away a little bit, and after that, it worked fine.
>
> (School-based teacher educator)

Generally speaking, coaches are expected to create trustful relationships with student teachers to elicit their active involvement in practicums. Simultaneously, coaches need to be sensitive to the opposite effect when the relationship becomes too familiar.

3.1.5 Encouraging Core Reflection

In the Netherlands, reflection on the level of identity is officially included in the curriculum of teacher education, and student teachers are required to report their vision of being a teacher regularly.

> It is part of their compulsory coursework. They have to write a *startvisie* [description of an ideal teacher], adapt it after eight weeks of training, and again at the end of the first and second semesters. They are expected to learn from and refer to input, feedback, and feed forward from their coaches, fellow students, and literature. They are also expected to articulate their intentions and apply concrete actions.
>
> (Institute-based teacher educator)

The onion model (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Korthagen, Kim, & Greene, 2013) consists of six layers: environment, behavior, competencies, beliefs, identity, and mission. It encourages student teachers to broaden their reflection and address the discrepancies in their professional development. In most cases, their practicum experience includes psychological conflicts between ideals and reality. Student teachers may lose their motivation to learn if they continue to experience the negativity of such conflicts. In worst cases, they could lament their feelings of incompetence and seek comfort in being dependent on coaches. One coach said that she promoted the student teacher's core reflections in such a case.

> I once asked one of my trainees if she could recall what made her want to become a teacher. I did so because she seemed not to enjoy the teaching, and I wondered whether she could regain a sense of her original dream or mission.
>
> (School-based teacher educator)

Core reflection encourages a continuous transition between thinking, feeling, and wanting (Korthagen et al., 2013; Evelein & Korthagen, 2015). It raises student teachers' awareness that affective and motivational factors are a part of an authentic experience and should be integrated into their reflections. Interestingly, another coach mentioned that a particular issue often shapes such opportunities.

> Usually, the reflection on the level of identity revolves around the competency of classroom discipline and order. Questions regarding the consistency of adequate responses to (un)wanted behavior to deal with this matter. Students have to deal with their subjective concept of their teaching role models and become the teacher they envisioned.
>
> (Institute-based teacher educator)

Finding and raising the core qualities from which they generate their missions and identity is an essential part of teacher education, and coaches can better support student teachers by maximizing their self-directed motive. One of the coaches described how student teachers could improve their qualities through coaching.

> In the coaching session, I focus on the positive at

> the start. I will emphasize a specific part of the student teacher's character during our sessions, and eventually, the teacher uses it in her lessons to get the desired outcome. As long as you acknowledge the positive side of their character in a classroom situation, student teachers will recognize it as a core strength after a few sessions.
>
> (School-based teacher educator)

This coach mentioned the importance of supporting interventions, which helped student teachers recognize their strengths and integrate them into their teaching. Randall and Thornton (2001) stated that supportive intervention is essential to create an atmosphere of trust and empathy, which is central to giving advice, without which the student teachers will not feel free to talk and explore the situation with their coaches. In that sense, supportive interventions must precede other intervention types to have student teachers actively participate in coaching sessions.

3.1.6 Organizing and Facilitating Group Reflection

According to Bellersen and Kohlmann (2016), *intervision*, which does not have a straightforward English translation, means "group reflection" and it has a long tradition in the Dutch community of management consultants (p.7). This includes various dialogue methods with which student teachers conduct group discussions in placement schools or universities. Some coaches mentioned that their student teachers had regular opportunities to share their experiences with their peers.

> Students engage in a course called *intervisie*. They learn to reflect on their professional competence and how to help each other. They learn to ask questions that lead to answers. I have a booklet that helps me construct activities that promote self-reflection and are, among others, aimed at core qualities.
>
> (Institute-based teacher educator)

> As a communication technique, the gossip method is used. A student turns around while the others discuss the problem. Other methods include incident method and success stories. They discuss why was it a success? What were the conditions? What did you do? What did others do? What type of environment was helpful? The student teachers have to think and help others [the case-provider] think by asking questions.
>
> (School-based teacher educator)

In addition to one-on-one reflection sessions, coaches can organize peer group reflection and facilitate the discussion with various *intervision* methods (see Bellersen & Kohlmann, 2016). During *intervision* sessions, coaches must remain in the facilitator's role and not disturb the discussion by asking questions or giving advice. From a practical and motivational perspective, they need to share their experiences with empathy and broaden their views in an informal atmosphere.

Moreover, sharing experiences within a peer group during lectures could confirm their concerns at placement schools about their methodology choice. This could encourage them to consider other options to understand decision-making. One educator explained the flow of her lecture as follows:

> In class, they can always ask burning questions. At the start of each lesson, there is time to discuss the problems they encountered. It often has to do with making a grammatical topic more fun, acceptable/easier to understand, or dealing with strategies. Together with the other students, we develop different approaches suitable for different age groups/group sizes.
>
> (Institute-based teacher educator)

This excerpt may remind readers of the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), advocated by Shulman (1986). It includes knowledge about "the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" and "an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult" (p.9). Loughran, Takeda, Oda, Saito, and Sasaki (2019) postulated that sharing the concept of PCK among school- and institute-based teacher educator is essential to interconnect theory and practice in ways that student teachers will understand the dynamic nature of teaching. Teacher education is more than the accumulation of possible actions in a particular situation, and student teachers need to reflect on decision-making embedded in their experience and that of their peers'. Group reflection provides great opportunities to enhance insight into pedagogical reasoning.

3.2 Student Teachers

3.2.1 Common Issues in the Practicum

There were many common issues that they worked on during practicum. It was revealed during the interviews that student teachers primarily worked with the following issues.

Fear and anxiety

> One of my weaknesses is that I am very insecure about everything. I know I will do a good job, but I get very nervous. In conversations with people, the feedback was always like, "You need to calm down."
>
> (First-year student teacher)

> In the beginning, I was way too nervous, scared of everything and scared that I would not be able to hold my own. I was uptight and insecure in front of the classroom.
>
> (Second-year student teacher)

Lesson structure

> Sometimes I was not well prepared. I had not visualized lessons, so there were pauses in between my lessons.
>
> (Fourth-year student teacher)

> I work with a clear beginning, mid-part, and end, and evaluating the lesson at the end. That does not occur in each lesson, but I tend to use this structure daily.
>
> (Fourth-year student teacher)

Adjustment and differentiation

> It is not easy to adapt my teaching to be suitable for the English proficiency level of pupils.
>
> (Graduate student teacher)

> You have to choose the correct level of English proficiency in the classroom. However, it is not easy to know everyone's proficiency level. The assignments have to be structured so that everyone can do well. That is hard to do.
>
> (Fourth-year student teacher)

> The difference in proficiency level is remarkable. Some pupils barely know what the difference is between an adverb and an adjective.
>
> (Second-year student teacher)

Time management

> I think time management is a big problem. Yeah, I tend to always have too much to do in the last 5 minutes.
>
> (Graduate student teacher)

Clear directions and explanations

> Regarding my first problem with keeping pupils' attention, my instructions need to be more apparent.
>
> (Graduate student teacher)

> Sometimes my explanation might be too difficult to understand, and I end up explaining it properly individually rather than in front of the class.
>
> (Second-year student teacher)

Preparing fun exercises and tasks

> The hard part was finding exercises that were fun to do. You will find many exercises to do, but not all of them work the way you want it to.
>
> (Fourth-year student teacher)

> I still learn new ways of teaching every day. For example, TBL (Task-Based Learning) is one of these.
>
> (Fourth-year student teacher)

Use of target language

> Especially when it is about grammar, I will lose them all if I continue in English. So it is a personal struggle like, okay, I want to expose them more to English, but I know that I also have to do a little bit in Dutch. And then, the lesson is not effective anymore, so that's more of a struggle inside of me, "I'd really like to talk in English but...."
>
> (Fourth-year student teacher)

Language proficiency

> The problem I still have is that if I do not practice English enough, I notice a decrease in my English level.
>
> (Fourth-year student teacher)

Subject knowledge

> During a lesson I was kind of, "I don't know, but I'll

look it up for you," and then I will look it up and sometimes I will ask my coach, and then in the next lesson I will answer their questions. However, it makes me feel less competent.

(Fourth-year student teacher)

Discipline and order

At the beginning of the year, I really wanted the students to like me, so I was quite relaxed with phones thinking that if I trust them, they will return the trust and not be on their phones. However, it was a mistake because they cannot stay away from the phones, and then they started being on it too much, and my coach showed me that because I was not even really aware of it. My coach said, "You are losing your authority over them because you permit too much," and it shocked me.

(Graduate student teacher)

In the beginning, I did not set strict rules and guidelines for my classes. I do now, although I still experience difficulty implementing the rules and making sure the consequences are known.

(Fourth-year student teacher)

These issues are often interlinked in classroom situations, and they are challenging to solve overnight. Coaches need to adopt a strategy combining authoritative and facilitative interventions from cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspectives. In the following section, we investigate how student teachers experience learning through coaching.

3.2.2 How do Coaches Instruct Student Teachers, and What is Their Experience of it?

Student teachers were also asked how their coaches instructed them, and whether they liked it. Most of their responses were positive for the following reasons.

Informants of tips and tricks

I was given thoughts and ideas to handle my classes, new ideas to implement in my lessons. My coach helped me a lot with classroom management.

(Fourth-year student teacher)

My coach has inspired me in many ways, but she also shows me easy tricks on doing things in class. For example, how she gives instructions. She said, "always tell them [the pupils] how much time they have. Tell them what is expected, what they should have done when the time is ended. Tell them what tools they can use and if they can work together or alone. Tell them whether they can look things up or not." All those things together, that's what I mean by giving instructions or activities. Otherwise, students will interpret it in their way, or they will be confused and not do it properly, and that's something I still sometimes forget to do.

(Graduate student teacher)

Student teachers typically appreciate their coaches' knowledge of coping with problems, which could lead to immediate solutions. This is understandable if we consider their fear and anxiety, especially in the beginning of the practicums. This type of instruction is not wrong at all. In the process, student teachers get to know their coaches and recognize them as reliable sources of information. Knowledge of "how to" would help student teachers, even awkwardly, go through a lesson as they planned. It allows for greater flow during teaching, addressing the problems mentioned in the previous section. However, student teachers need to go beyond that and feel competent and confident with their ideas and decision-making. It will improve their motive for self-directed learning.

On-demand consultant

If I have a problem, I can email him. He is there, so that's a strong point. He is always available if you need him. In the first two years, you were forced to coach every week. But it's good because you are just starting up, getting to know yourself, your study, and your peers, so it is good. However, as the years go by, I had more freedom. That is what I enjoy about the coaching here.

(Fourth-year student teacher)

Once the student teachers have developed sufficient confidence, it is important to gradually reduce the frequency of formal coaching. It is like practicing to ride a bicycle, which starts with training wheels, and then taking it off when the children wish to do so. Coaches need to have an attitude to watch over student teachers with respect, and when necessary, protect them from

reaching their breaking point with serious incidents.

Facilitator of reflection for learning from within

> My coach would always tell me to focus on the critical incidents I have noticed during the lesson, and reflect on how I handled and experienced it.
>
> (Second-year student teacher)

> My coach always tells me that I can ask her anything, she is very open. So she just tells me that I can ask her anything and she is very respectful towards me. I will not feel embarrassed if I do not know everything.
>
> (omission)
>
> I also like feedback because I want to be the best I can be. I like it when people tell me that some things can be improved. But also it is something within myself, I really reflect on the way I see things, and it often turns out that the way I see myself is not really how it really is.
>
> (Third-year student teacher)

Reflecting on the comment from a coach that avoids creating an advice list, it is important to listen to the student teachers. The premise is what coaches see in class may be different from what student teachers experience. Coaches need to be open to any comments or questions and hold attitude of respecting student teachers' emotions and decision-making. That is how student teachers will find their critical incidents. It is important to avoid leading into right or wrong discussions, in which student teachers are forced into natural hierarchy. Feedback is not meant to provide practical knowledge but to help student teachers turn the focus on themselves. It means that they are guided to seek for the possible discrepancies between their visions and actions. This will facilitate development beyond gathering tips and tricks. According to Korthagen's realistic approach, learning from a real situation as experienced by student teachers is the desirable starting point for effective reflection.

There were a few negative responses about chronic time shortages for coaching sessions and inconsistent instructions from various coaches.

> When it comes to teaching outside the classroom, I find that communication is often difficult. Most of the time, the coaches are already really busy and do not have enough time to provide feedback or divide tasks evenly, or on time.
>
> (Second-year student teacher)

> It is very challenging because sometimes, the feedback I receive from our various coaches is in contradiction with each other.
>
> (Second-year student teacher)

It would be a problem if busy coaches make student teachers reluctant to ask for instructions when they need it. If not, those comments could turn out to be positive when student teachers are successful with self-directed learning and enjoy their freedom and independence.

3.2.3 Core Reflection: Discovering Self-Identity as a Teacher

Student teachers, especially at the first stage of practicum, are concerned about how their coaches assess them. If coaches dominate with authoritative interventions, they could prevent student teachers from making their choices for improvement based on experience. The following episodes show how student teachers struggled with fear and take back learning ownership.

Overcoming fear and anxiety

> In the beginning, I used to mimic my coaches' style of teaching so entirely that I did whatever he did, which included reproducing his vision and classroom structure because it was safe, and the students knew exactly what they had to do. Eventually, I got tired of the farce and started to think on my own and created a vision of how I wanted my classroom to be. Then, I realized that I liked group work and pair work, but I still wanted to give students the chance to work individually. However, how can I do that? I got stuck, so I did not go through with it. The only thing I did was let them work in pairs, which was my little rebellion for that year. Then, I got to work at this school, and my coach showed me how I could structure my lesson to bring forth my vision.
>
> (Second-year student teacher)

> Because the coach was in the classroom, I was always thinking, what will he think if I do this, or would he approve if I go about it like this? This

stopped me from doing what I needed to do.

(omission)

I noticed that pupils were more appreciative of me as a teacher when I was myself. At first, I thought I would have to pretend to be someone I am not. The more I pretended, the less it worked out, but the more I was myself, the more they listened to what I had to say. I think there is a particular vulnerability that I experience, and if I am willing to show it, students appreciate it and start showing more interest. I noticed it last year when a coach from my college arrived to review my lesson. She graded my lesson and told me that the authentic relationship I had with the students was good to see and positively affected them.

(Fourth-year student teacher)

In the first stage of practicum, student teachers tend to mimic their coaches to avoid fear and anxiety. However, they gradually become aware of their wishes and core qualities, which emerge from themselves through experience and their relationship with the pupils. The student teacher in the first example took action, calling it "rebellion," after copying her coaches. It shows that feeling safe in the classroom by any means would be necessary for further action. The student teacher in the second example talked about her experience of feeling "present" through her interaction with pupils, a full awareness of the "here and now" (Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2013, p.78), which is central to the core reflection approach. Coaches need to avoid pressurizing student teachers and wait until they feel safe and start thinking of their actions. This will help student teachers discover their vision and realize them to benefit the pupils.

One coach pointed out that, "usually the reflection on the level of identity revolves around the competency of classroom discipline and order." (see section 3.1.5). That implies that the relationship with pupils is prone to bring about critical incidents for the student teachers. Below are some responses from student teachers who had the opportunity to reflect on their teaching.

Establishing relationships with pupils

Very often, my coach would ask me about the specific choices I made. She would not say this is working or not working, but she would ask me; "I am just curious, why did you make this choice?" She would regularly ask me to reflect on what kind of teacher I wanted to be. About the amount of freedom pupils get, she asked, "Are you happy with that?" or "Do you think you should be stricter?" I think it is the best way because she is not forcing her way of teaching, but encouraging me to think about what kind of teacher I want to be. Yeah, she really helped me with that.

(Graduate student teacher)

I want to be liked, so I like to have a comfortable atmosphere in my classroom, which is how it is when I talk to people. I try to make people comfortable when I have them over at my home. I want to do that for my student, but you cannot take care of 30 students in that way, so I had to change that. I had to change the way I care about the students, so I needed to step back for a moment because they have to develop and feel responsible for things.

(Fourth-year student teacher)

At the beginning of the practicum, most student teachers are very sensitive about the relationships they form with pupils. They tend to feel reluctant to take strict action against pupils. Sometimes student teachers get too close to pupils without being aware of losing authority, which appears as an issue of discipline and order (see section 3.2.1). The relationship with pupils often relates to their core qualities, such as kindness, affection, and faithfulness. Student teachers need to accumulate real experience interacting with pupils before they find better actions for a safe and comfortable learning environment in harmony with teacher competency. The following excerpt illustrates a student teacher's emotional conflict to adapt her core qualities from learners' perspective.

It is a kind of instinct to help pupils immediately. I want them to feel that they can ask me for help, and I really want to help them become better at it. However, I noticed that if I start helping them right away, I am taking their opportunity away to try it themselves and experience their success without my help.

(omission)

Well, I know that I became better in giving them

> their opportunities. In that way, I experienced changes in how I want to be as a teacher and how I have to project it to the class.
>
> (Fourth-year student teacher)

The last excerpt shows a student teacher's analysis of her conflict on the level of identity. She tried to observe other teachers' lessons and found core qualities that generate specific actions in class. Admitting that teachers could reach solutions with different approaches, she could adjust her identity and be free from unnecessary lament or despair. This attitude enables student teachers to reach a more profound understanding of what they observe in class, which facilitates reflection to find their core qualities, and how to apply it.

> Inner conflicts that I sometimes have are that I find a teacher very inspiring for specific characteristics. The problem appears when I do not have those characteristics, even if I try to. Sometimes you cannot copy someone's strengths, and you have to find your way to overcome the problem. An example of what I mean is that a teacher can be naturally funny, have a soothing voice, or be a great storyteller, but if it is not in your character to be that way, it is pointless to try to be that. This is when you need to look at your strengths and think of another idea to overcome your problems.
>
> (Second-year student teacher)

Some student teachers' comments indicate that core reflection helps them understand their thinking and feelings about their identity or wishes of being a teacher. There must be regular opportunities in reflective sessions, both at university and placement schools.

4. Conclusion

This paper reported the results of interviews conducted with student teachers and their coaches in the Netherlands. Through narrative analysis, it was revealed that student teachers and their coaches admitted the value of self-directed learning and understood their roles in professional development. The student teachers were aware of their responsibilities to find and cope with discrepancies between their views and actions with coaches' help. Their coaches were aware of their facilitative role and used their skills to promote the student teachers' reflections in combination with their knowledge and experience. What makes it possible? This paper ends with a summary of the key elements for self-directed teacher education in the Netherlands.

First, the SBL competency list with indicators provides a foundation for curriculum development, which works as a platform for quality assurance. A consistent system of goals and programs enables student teachers and their coaches to implement competency-based teacher education, in which reflection skills are included as a part of the qualification. During interviews, it was noticed that Institute-based teacher educators were more appreciative of competencies and conscious of implementation when developing an assessment grid for practicums. They are expected to share it with school-based teacher educators. Having consensus about the curriculum's policy concept is essential to provide student teachers with consistent instructions and fair assessments. Setting consecutive goals within the competency framework helps student teachers monitor their progress and promote self-management.

Second, self-directed teacher education is not a hands-off policy, and the role of coaches does matter to bring the best out of student teachers. Student teachers need to feel safe and accepted as members of teaching profession to start learning from within. Institute- and school-based teacher educators are expected to support the process by showing their weaknesses and imperfectness and provide balanced interventions.

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Notes

1) Six categories of intervention: authoritative intervention consists of prescriptive, informative, and confronting intervention, and; facilitative intervention consists of cathartic, catalytic, and supportive intervention.

2) The SBL competency list consists of seven domains: interpersonal, pedagogical, subject/methodological, organizational, collaboration with peers/colleagues, collaboration with external experts/partners, and

reflection. Available at https://wij-leren.nl/SBL-competenties.php

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