

Investigating the internalization of professional role expectations among pre-service teachers

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SUMMARY

Several scholars of teacher education (see for example 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). Several recent studies on teacher identity development (see e.g. Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013a) 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, and how to support this process. In the current study, we introduce a questionnaire that was developed to explore the formation of a teacher's professional identity. The questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical notions (see the following subsection) that relate to the abovementioned dialogical tradition.

Dialogical becoming

According to the socio-cultural approach, the psychological functioning of humans is shaped by constructive interactions between the individual and the surroundings by means of semiotically mediated cultural material. These dialogical relations result in the adaptation of existing meanings and in the creation of new meanings (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007). The constant exchange of perceptual and semiotic material with the environment leads to the reconstruction of intra-psychological worlds (Valsiner, 2001).

The laminal model (Valsiner, 2001) describes the person-environment dialogue in terms of constructive processes of internalization/externalization. Internalization is the process of the analysis and synthesis of externally existing

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semiotic material into an intra-personally different form. Externalization, a parallel and complementary process to internalization, is the process of the analysis of personal-cultural material during its transposition into the external environment that thereafter becomes modified.

The Dialogical Self theory (DST) (Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) was applied in this study to understand intra-psychological dynamics when assuming a professional role. DST conceives the self as a system that consists of relatively autonomous I-positions between which the self fluctuates. These I-positions have been shaped through different historical, institutional and social events. Thus, the migration of students into the new social-environment can be viewed as an experience that supports the formation of the new I-position (I as a professional). The emergence of I-positions can be due to any kind of professional practice (e.g. attending classes, the formal settings of the school practicum) but can also be formed by informal factors (e.g. expectations of friends). DST, therefore, makes it possible to explain the formation of an identity by focusing on the emergence of I-positions within the context of professional-institutional practices and their relationship to other I-positions.

Our study also relies on the standpoint that inherently inconsistent I-positions („I as myself” and „I as a professional”) create ambivalent conditions when internalizing a professional role into the self-system. The treatment of ambivalence in the study indicates processes with a different orientation in a whole (Abbey & Valsiner, 2005). Consequently, ambivalence that emerges within the conditions of the co-existence of different I-positions is conceived of as a key factor in the process of the internalization of the professional role (Kullasepp, 2008).

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, a test aiming to evaluate the dynamics of the internalization of a professional role in the course of solving ambivalent pedagogical dilemmas was developed. An empirical study was conducted to evaluate the properties of the developed questionnaire and to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between the emotional response to the ambivalence and presentation of professional positions in student answers?
2. What is the relationship between work and study experience and the presentation of professional positions in student answers?

Following the Dialogical Self Theory premise that conflicting voices cohere in a self through synthesizing and dialogical relations, it is expected that with the progress of studies and pedagogical experiences, how teachers handle the ambivalent conditions of entering the professional role shows more extensive elimination of tension and growing presentation of professional

positions. The latter is supported by findings from a recent pilot study (*Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013a*) showing that in comparison to others, student teachers who presented professional I-positions before and after pedagogical practice in a stable manner less often presented negative emotions as a reaction to the ambivalence.

Method

Participants

Data were collected over a period of two years, from 109 students, who followed different subject teacher curricula in one university. The sample consisted of 70 students (67%) who had just started their studies, 16 students who had finished the first year of teacher education, and 18 students who had reached the mid-point of the second year of teacher education (32% of the sample had study experience in a teacher education curriculum) – 54 % of the sample had no teaching experience.

Data collection

A DDTC-Teacher (Double Direction Theme Completion-Teacher) questionnaire was developed in this study based on earlier versions of DDTC questionnaires (Kullasepp, 2008; Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013a). A DDTC is an extended version of the traditional sentence completion task (Symonds, 1947) that provides the temporal profiles of the coordination of personal orientations and professional roles. The developed questionnaire consisted of nine dilemmas. The selection of dilemmas was based on finding a variety of ambivalent situations related to i) pupils, ii) subject matter, and iii) colleagues, parents and acquaintances. Typical situations were chosen that would activate the inner dialogue between „I as a person” and „I as a professional”. For example, in the case of a dilemma related to ‘providing confidential information to third parties’ the student was triggered to identify how she communicated about the tension between the professional role and personal ethics. Second, the student was invited to indicate how she solves ambivalent dilemmas – whether she presents a professional position or another position. The other eight dilemmas were: ‘asked to teach a student after school hours’, ‘no place for a friend’s child in an after-school group’, ‘thinking often about a student who has problems at home’, ‘working with an unpleasant colleague’, ‘communicating with an unpleasant parent’, ‘teaching an uninteresting topic’, ‘having difficulties with teaching a very important topic to students’, and ‘teaching students who are not interested in learning’. The relevance of the

dilemmas was approved by two experienced teachers and a leading teacher educator.

Data coding and analysis

Firstly, communication about the tension between the I-positions was identified in the answers. Regarding the tension, two codes were distinguished: reporting negatively orientated tensions (coded as 1) and reporting non-negative emotions (coded as 0). Secondly, professional role internalization was coded through presentations of professional I-positions (see Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013a for further information) (coded as 1) and other answers (coded as 0). Eighty-one (81) randomly selected answers (9 student answers to 9 dilemmas) from the database were independently analysed by a second researcher to test for inter-rater reliability. This resulted in an inter-rater reliability score of 0.96 (Cohen's Kappa) regarding the communication of negative emotions, and 0.91 (Cohen's Kappa) regarding professional I-positions.

Chi-square tests and configurational frequency analysis (CFA) were used to explore relationships between variables.

Major results and discussion

The inner-reliability score for the questionnaire was modest (Cronbach α 0.65). However, considering the manner of coding and the sample size, we considered this sufficient in the current study. Additional data need to be collected in order to give a more precise estimation of the questionnaire properties.

To answer the first research question, a CFA was employed to compare the presentation of professional I-positions (PIP) with the presentation of a combination of PIP and the communication of negative emotions. The results revealed that, in accordance with the researchers' intentions, the ambivalent situations had commonly evoked tensions and negative emotions. In addition, the results showed that students with a higher PMP score had more commonly reported neutral or positive emotions in their answers. This finding provides some support for the propositions of the study as we expected that the internalisation of PMP decreases tensions and is therefore related to less frequent communication of negative emotions.

In order to answer the second research question, a series of Chi-square tests were used. In accordance with the propositions, we found that a higher level of work and study experience is related to the more frequent presentation

of PIP. In separate analyses, a significant correlation appeared only between work experiences and PIP. Therefore, the results do not support an opinion where university- and theory-centred teacher education in itself would support the internalization of the professional role as also shown by other studies (e.g. Alsup, 2006; Danielewicz, 2001). Rather, the internalization could be supported by an integrated approach of practice and theoretical studies, as also shown by others (see e.g. Korthagen, 2001; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

The major limitation of the current study is the sample size; a higher number of students with work- and study experience needs to be included in a sample for future studies in order to verify and explore the results presented in the current study.

Keywords: teacher professional identity, pre-service teacher education, role internalization, subject teacher, Dialogical Self Theory, socio-cultural approach