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Student-teachers' concerns about teaching practice

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The essence of helping student-teachers lies in an exploration of their concerns about teaching. Based on this assumption, the current study aimed to explore student-teachers' concerns and potential topics of reflection, following their teaching experiences. The analysis of fifty-nine journals revealed the complex pattern of past and future-oriented concerns relevant to students' personal and professional identity, the mission and fading of the teaching profession, and the emotional dimensions of teaching. This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion about developing growth-producing experiences for student-teachers through their teaching practice.

Die Erforschung der Interessen und Sorgen von Lehrerstudierenden bezüglich des Lehrens stellt eine wesentliche Hilfe für sie dar. Auf der Grundlage dieser Einschätzung bestand das Ziel dieser Studie darin, zu explorieren, auf welche Thematiken und Interessen sich die Reflexionen der Lehrerstudierenden, im Zusammenhang ihrer Lehrerfahrung, beziehen. Die Analyse von 59 Zeitschriften brachte diesbezüglich folgende Sachverhalte zu Tage: es existiert ein komplexes Muster von Vergangenheits- und Zukunftsorientierten Interessen, die relevant für die personale und die professionelle Identität der Studierenden sind; das Auf und Ab der Lehrerprofession; die emotionalen Dimensionen des Lehrens. Dieser Aufsatz will zu den laufenden Diskussionen über die über ihre Lehrpraxis vermittelt Schaffung von entwicklungsermöglichenden Erfahrungen für Lehrerstudierende beitragen.

Introduction

Student teaching is considered by prospective teachers as the most significant factor in their educational programmes (Zeichner, 1990; McDonald, 1993; Mitchell & Schwager, 1993; Clement, 1999). It takes on a distinct importance in the formation of their role and perceptions of their responsibilities as future teachers (Fennell, 1993; Killen, 1994; Mason, 1997; Harlin *et al.*, 2001). At the same time, there is widespread agreement that the recognition, examination and rumination over prospective teachers' beliefs, experiences, attitudes and concerns as they progress through student teaching, offer insights to teacher educators for the amelioration of

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teacher preparation programmes. Fuller (1969) was the first to develop a concerns-based model of teacher development. This suggests that in the course of teaching practice, student-teachers progress through three discrete stages of concerns: in the first stage, they worry about their personal adequacy and survival in class; in the second, their concerns refer to the teaching task and, in the third, teachers' concerns transfer to individual pupil's needs. Pigge and Marso (1997) in their longitudinal study of prospective teachers, partly supported Fuller's model on the developmental changes in teachers' concerns, providing evidence that concerns about survival as a teacher decreased, concerns about the task of teaching increased, while concerns about pupils remained stable at all points of their career development. Conway and Clark (2003) concur that the pattern of concern moves outward from concerns about self, to concerns about tasks and finally concerns about students, as described by Fuller. They go on to add that patterns of concern move inward to the development of self-as-teacher, challenging the sequential evolvement of teachers' concerns. Burn *et al.* (2003) suggest that the linear view of teacher development is too simplistic. They advocate a high level of concern about pupils' learning, and an awareness of the complexity of teaching from the beginning of their training.

Reflection offers a means of unfolding prospective teachers' concerns and personal theories and integrating them into teaching decisions. By personal theories we refer to latent knowledge, personal experiences, the beliefs and values prospective teachers hold with respect to teaching (Matsagouras, 1999; Papoulia-Tzelepi & Spinthourakis, 2000). With the employment of active reflection, student-teachers can 'construct their own learning through an interaction among their beliefs, their prior knowledge and their experiences' (Lin *et al.*, 1999, p. 5). It is supported that the 'development of thoughtful reflectivity in teacher' is one of the cornerstones of teacher professionalisation (Groce *et al.*, 1999). In fact, understanding and improvement of teaching begins with reflection and a critique of personal experiences (Papoulia-Tzelepi, 1993, 1996). Reflection was originally defined by in 1933, as 'an active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends' (p. 9). Schon (1983, 1987) further discriminated between 'reflection-in-action', in which teachers reflect on actions in an immediate and interactive way, and 'reflection-on-action', in which teachers reflect on actions in the recent past. Although the concept of reflection has not been clearly defined yet, and there is an ironically unreflective usage of the term (Calderhead, 1989), there is general agreement in the literature on the importance of unfolding student-teachers' reflective thoughts, in order to improve their teaching (Francis, 1995; Penny *et al.*, 1996; Griffiths, 2000; Fendler, 2003), and there are a considerable number of training programmes with a reflective orientation (Carter, 1997; Matthews, 1998; Veronesi & Varrella, 1999; Wood, 2000; Edwards *et al.*, 2002).

The literature on reflective teaching reveals an emphasis on either the content (Conway, 2001; Parsons & Stephenson, 2005), the process (Black *et al.*, 2000; Korthagen *et al.*, 2001), the levels (Yost *et al.*, 2000; Seng, 2001) or the pedagogy of reflection (Freese, 1999; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Spalding & Wilson, 2002; Thurlow

et al., 2004). Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) offer a more holistic view of reflection, incorporating feelings, emotions, needs and values. Their onion model of reflection illustrates how teachers' reflection moves from an outward to an inward focus, from aspects of the environment, behaviour, competencies, beliefs to what they call 'core reflection'. Core reflection centres on professional identity, that is the experience of self as teacher, and mission, which is the reason why someone decides to become a teacher. The concept of professional identity receives different definitions in the literature. Nias (1989) distinguished between the core self and the teaching self, and argued for the dynamic interaction of the personal values and beliefs incorporated in the core self and the way in which teachers ultimately conceptualise and practice teaching according to these beliefs, thereby forming the teaching self. Teaching is a profession that strongly affects and is affected by the kind of person the teacher is. Through self-reflection student-teachers integrate their experiences and social requirements with their image of selves as teachers. Mission on the other hand, deals with philosophical questions about teachers' ideal contributions to the profession, such as 'why' the person decided to become a teacher, or what (s)he anticipates achieving through teaching. Korthagen (2004) further relates the core reflection aspects of identity and mission with personal or 'core' qualities such as creativity, trust, care, courage, kindness, fairness, commitment, sensitivity and the new trend of positive psychology, which shifts the focus from pathology and weakness to the enhancement of strengths and positive traits.

Although the interchange of feelings, emotions and needs in teacher reflection is comprehensively described in the onion model, little attention is paid to the role of emotions in education. Hargreaves (2000) refers to the disturbing neglect of the emotional dimension in the rationalised world of education, and the dearth of studies on the way emotions shape student-teachers' interactions. Emotions are an integral part of teaching. Emotions, cognition and actions are mutually connected and take place interchangeably during the teaching and learning process. 'Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy' (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835). In a complementary vein, the new educational trends of Emotional Intelligence and Social and Emotional Learning highlight the importance of emotional awareness, understanding and management and the cultivation of other social and emotional skills for being an effective teacher and a successful person (Goleman, 1995; 1998, Triliva & Poulou, in press).

Current research

Reflection-oriented learning requests student-teachers to explicitly elaborate their own beliefs and values before undergoing the experience of teaching (Hamilton, 1998). Reflection after practice, though, may be a more effective way of students' beliefs changing, than reflection before practice (Tillema, 2000). Based on this assumption, the current study aimed to explore students' concerns following their

teaching practice experience, once released from the tension which compulsory teaching practice generates.

On the other hand, although there is considerable emphasis in the literature on promoting reflection in teachers, it is not always clear which topics teachers are supposed to reflect on if they wish to become better teachers. Obviously the potential matters for reflection are limitless, but an ethical issue arises when teacher educators decide by themselves on the topics their students should be trained to reflect. Within the framework of a course, reflection may focus on particular activities, past events or activities that learners bring on their own to the course, which comprise a stimulus for their learning (Boud, 2001). We, as teacher educators, cannot be aware of the essential components of our students' reflection, while we assume that there is value in capturing where teachers do focus their attention. Deep levels of reflection are not always the most appropriate forms of reflection. Concern for self and coping with teaching tasks should be the immediate focus of teachers (Ward & McCotter, 2004). Bearing in mind that it is difficult for novice teachers to reflect (McIntyre, 1992), and the lack of our student-teachers' experience on reflective practice, the term 'reflection' in this study is used to describe 'the process of making sense of one's experiences by deliberately and actively examining one's thoughts and actions to arrive at new ways of understanding oneself as a teacher' (Freese, 1999, p. 898). The term retrospection is alternatively used to denote the attempt to reveal information derived from actions in the past.

Thus, the current study attempted to identify the topics related to teaching practice on which student-teachers naturally reflect, thus providing a repertoire of themes for discussion between student-teachers and teacher educators. It attempted to elicit student-teachers' concerns, worries, beliefs and feelings which dominated their teaching practice, when they were asked to retrospect on their experiences. This type of information provides teacher educators with an opportunity to conceptualise teaching practice through students' eyes, and further evaluate the training programmes offered to their students. It is argued that an important factor contributing to the incomplete transfer of the theories taught in the university to classroom teaching practice in fact lies in the failure of prospective teacher training programmes to act upon and challenge the student-teachers' already formed beliefs (Wubbells, 1992; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002).

Method

Sumsion and Fleet (1996) concluded that there are substantial difficulties in identifying and assessing reflection. Little is known about how reflection can be best measured, or whether it can be measured at all. Given methodological limitations, the assessment of reflective thinking raises both issues of consistency as well as ethical concerns. While there are studies which have attempted to quantify reflection (Sparks-Langer *et al.*, 1990; Seng, 2001), most of our understanding of reflection in teacher education has been derived from qualitative research (Wade & Yarbrough, 1996; Barksdale-Ladd *et al.*, 2001; Darling, 2001; Cautreels, 2003). Increasingly,

learning journals are used as a way to initiate critical reflection in university students, whereas many teacher training programmes utilise journals as vehicles for systematic reflection (Bolin, 1990; Hoover, 1994; Clarke, 1995; Black *et al.*, 2000; Trotman & Kerr, 2001; Bain *et al.*, 2002; Good & Whang, 2002; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). The response journal as 'a notebook or folder in which students record, in a variety of formats, their personal reactions to, questions about, and reflections on what they read, write, observe, listen to, discuss, do and think' (Parsons, 1994, p. 12), actually allows students to ask questions, make connections, admit discrepancies, consider alternatives and grow intellectually. Notably, Boud (2001) developed a model for learning from experience, and described three types of reflection and the role of journal writing in each one: a) reflection in anticipation of events; that is, a consideration of factors in order to prepare for future events. Journal writing helps to clarify questions about the anticipated events to make them productive experiences; b) reflection in the midst of action; that is, our engagement with an event comprises a learning experience. Journal writing helps us to recognise new features of the situation and plan and implement alternative interventions; c) reflection after events; that is, evaluation of our experience, feelings and decision-making. Journal writing offers a means of retrieving the frame of the events as they took place. Reflective journals can serve as reflective tools to both prospective teachers, by providing a permanent record of thoughts and experiences; a means of establishing and maintaining relationships with instructors; a safe outlet for personal concerns; an aid to internal dialogue; an aid to teacher educators, by providing a window to students' thinking and learning; a means of establishing and maintaining relationships with students, and a dialogical teaching tool (Spalding & Wilson, 2002).

The current study borrowed the methodological tool of teacher education studies and employed journals in order to explore student-teachers' thoughts and feelings about their teaching experience. Journals also served the secondary aim of the study, which was to indicate whether student-teachers use reflection when reconsidering, without restraint, their recent teaching experience and on what topics they mainly concentrate their reflective thoughts.

The context

The study was conducted at the end of the eighth semester of teaching practice. Teacher training programmes in Greek universities last four years, over eight semesters. In the Department of Elementary Education, University of Thrace, by the time the current study was conducted, third-year students (6th semester) had initiated their teaching practice, which at this stage comprises observations of in-service teachers in school settings. In their fourth year, their seventh semester, student-teachers teach specific subjects (maths, science, language), two days a week for five weeks, and when they reach the eighth semester, they teach the entire curriculum for five consecutive weeks. An attempt is made to provide students with the opportunity to teach in all six elementary school classes; however, this is not always possible due to the large number of students and the smaller number of schools.

Participants

The subjects participating in the study were 59 fourth year (52 females and 7 males), Department of Elementary Education students at the University of Thrace. Students were asked to express the personal thoughts, worries, feelings and concerns that preoccupied them during their five weeks of teaching practice, in a journal. Creativity was encouraged in terms of presentation, themes and format of the journals. The journals were not used for assessment purposes, so that students could feel free to record their thoughts about their teaching. Since students were using journals for the first time, they were provided with the following general themes to refer to:

(a) concerns about the teaching process,
(b) concerns about the teaching profession
(c) emotions about the teaching process

Data analysis

The journals were content-analysed by two educational researchers. The process of analysis followed the steps below: a) identification of the information included within each of the three general themes, following a reading and re-reading of each journal b) identification of categories to enable most of the information to be placed within a category or subcategory, c) negotiation between the researchers to agree the category labels and the information included and d) revision of the categories generated in the first phase. The two researchers did the initial identification independently, and then agreed upon the categories to code, thus providing triangulation. Going back and forth from data to our guiding frames led to the development of the dimensions of the teaching process, teaching profession and emotions for teaching as follows.

Results

Teaching process

At first, the teaching process made students realise and become familiar with the pragmatic nature of the teaching profession: 'Teaching is a tremendous experience, through which you become aware of the importance of the teaching profession and gain the foundations of professional development'. Next, the teaching process helped students recognise the connection between the knowledge gained in university courses and its application in real life settings, thus offering students the impetus for a reconsideration of their educational decisions: 'Teaching practice invites you to use various teaching models, turn back to the theories you have learned, and make comparisons and evaluations about their implementation in real situations, in classrooms'. Furthermore, the teaching process gave students the opportunity to indulge in their growing self and observe the concurrent development of their personal and professional identity.

The teaching process contributes to the awareness of personal identity

The teaching process constituted a revelation of students' capabilities and unknown elements of their character:

> The experience of the process of teaching altered my personal theories about dealing with unexpected events and the characteristics of my personality as well. I became more dialectic, calm, with a sense of humour and comfort. This change in my personality turned out to help me and consequently my pupils.

Another student admitted: 'In the classroom, I really became aware of my tolerance levels and limits'. At the same time, teaching provided students the means for continuous self-improvement and advancement of their personality: 'Teaching is a profession that offers you opportunities for self-improvement on a constant basis, and for observing such improvements as a reflection of your pupils' personalities'.

The teaching process contributes to the awareness of professional identity

Besides the evolving self, students had also the opportunity to retrospect on their evolving teaching identity. Classroom management and the didactics of the curriculum dominated their concerns about learning to teach.

Classroom management. The student-teachers' reports on classroom management mainly described the techniques they used in certain circumstances; these were either self-approving:

> I consider my reactions to a difficult child correct. Obviously, I could have reacted in alternative and even more effective ways, which I will learn through my experience as a teacher

or disapproving:

> There were times when I regretted my behaviour. I should have reacted more maturely and worked with the difficult child individually. Sometimes, though, you cannot control yourself and this drives your thoughts or actions, which you will regret later on.

Some students moved beyond simple reporting to a critical reconsideration of their choices and management decisions during their teaching experience:

> In the beginning of my teaching practice I reacted with tension and used a loud voice with difficult students. During my teaching though, my reactions altered. I reacted with an unexplained tranquillity, which I never thought I had as a person. It is obviously the latter reaction which I needed to use from the very beginning. I believe, though, that I had to react in the way I first did, in order to end up with my later reaction. I believe that the management of difficult students is not achieved with theoretical recipes.

Classroom management concerned student-teachers not only in respect of their self-survival in class and knowledge of discipline techniques: 'The most positive element of my teaching was that I learned how to avoid mistakes concerning both the teaching process itself and my behaviour towards pupils', but also in terms of the effect their management decisions have on pupils:

> I realised how weak the balance in the classroom can be and how facts that seem meaningless are of particular significance for some children. However, to pin-point children's values and teachers' awareness of these values is not easily achieved.

Teaching subject. Preparation of the teaching subject troubled teachers only in the first weeks of their teaching practice, but their worries diminished with the passing of teaching sessions:

> Up to a certain point, preparing the teaching subject was a very easy task for me, and the teaching steps I had to follow occurred more easily in my mind. At the same time, through teaching practice I could more easily use alternative teaching methods, which I had not scheduled before, in order to make pupils better comprehend the teaching subject.

On the other hand, what mostly concerned students from the beginning of their teaching practice was the comprehension of the teaching subject offered to their pupils, as well as the development of a criterion-measurement to assess their pupils' comprehension of the subject, which could, in turn, constitute the criterion-measurement for assessing the effectiveness of their own teaching:

> My main concern was the pupils' full comprehension of the material I taught them…in the first week of my teaching practice, a female pupil told me that a lesson was good, when they (the pupils) understood it! From that comment I realised that it is the pupils' comprehension which makes a lesson successful. This became my criterion for judging my own teaching as well.

The teaching process contributes to professional development

In addition, the teaching process offered students the impetus for further reconsideration of the experiences which took place during their teaching. Students' professional development, in turn, stems from the ongoing speculation of these experiences and the learning information they endorse:

> The important thing in teaching is not the successful product itself, but the process of teaching. The adventure starts with the material I have to teach, the organisation of the lesson and the concern about pupils' responses to my preparation. During the teaching process, various pleasant and unpleasant events take place which comprise learning material for yourself. Therefore, what is important to me is not the final teaching result, which is otherwise subjective, but the process towards that result and my personal gain through that developmental process. This is something that cannot be taught in any lecture theatre by any lecturer in the university.

The teaching profession

Teaching practice enabled students to obtain an actual picture of the teaching profession and realise the long lasting effect teaching has on children's lives. Through their journals, they complained about the unrealistic perceptions people have about teaching, and further expressed their own fears and aspirations for the profession they have decided to serve.

Lay peoples' perceptions of the teaching profession

Students first captured the distorted picture people have about teaching as a profession with low responsibilities, with few hours of work and longer holidays compared to other professions, and then argued against that misunderstanding:

> The teacher's role is very important but it is also misunderstood. Nowadays, people underestimate the teacher's role. They think that this profession is easy, with no requirements. This is not true. In fact, the teacher's role is full of responsibilities, since it has to build human personalities.

Student-teachers' perceptions of the teaching profession

Teaching as a mission. Students confessed that they too had had a distorted picture of the teaching profession before they started their teaching practice:

> I realised that the teaching profession is not as easy as I first thought. The teacher's role is significant in the development of the pupils' personality. Not only does it provide a model of behaviour for children, but in a few cases, it balances the parents' inadequate model.

> Soon after, they discovered the vital dimension of teaching which is related to the ongoing interaction with young people: 'Teaching is an interaction with young people. You can draw from their smiles, their liveliness and even learn from their perspectives on life',

and the underlying mission which accompanies the teaching profession:

> Being a teacher means that you are not an ordinary person, you become a model. The way you talk, get dressed, behave must always be decent. This is both pressing and challenging, since you have a unique chance to 'create' the new generation of people.

Another student even stated that: 'The teacher's role is compensatory in the general devaluation of our society'. The conceptualisation of teaching as a mission further generated queries about the values and ethos to be transmitted to pupils. A number of quotations illustrate their concerns: 'Teaching entails the equipping of pupils with values and ideals. But then the question arises which are these values and ideals, and to what degree do we, as a society, respect them?'. One student comprehensively articulated her thoughts by using a metaphor:

> What is the role of the teacher after all? Is (s)he a mobile library, a person full of knowledge like trivial pursuits, who spreads it generously or an innocent person without a personal view who just accompanies pupils on their wonderful journey of knowledge? In my opinion, what it actually requires is love, honesty and a lot of work, in order to succeed in a balanced, healthy and equal relationship between teachers and students. Teachers are everywhere, in every social position, in every team. The authority of the person who owns the knowledge over the person who does not, is one of the worst forms of authority. What we have to avoid in schools is a use of this authority which turns learning into a boring process. If we talk about dignity in our work, we have to avoid the easy way and work hard so that pupils learn to think freely, enter into intellectual dead ends, experience and discover. Otherwise, we produce people who uncritically adopt, reiterate and reproduce knowledge.

Teaching as a professional fading. Among students' concerns about their profession was the inherent fading within the teaching routine:

> Although I believe that teaching is very interesting since you interact with many children and have a variety of things to do, I feel that the repetitive nature of the teaching process becomes wearying for teachers.

Reflecting on the way their older colleagues exercise teaching, they were confronted with professional fatigue which, although natural, cannot be compatible with the teaching profession, in the students' eyes.

> During teaching practice I reflected on myself and the teachers whose classes I attended. I saw teachers who taught conventionally, were not well prepared, interacted poorly with pupils and even sometimes were authoritarian. It is obvious that the enthusiasm and motivation for teaching declines after many years of work. I believe though that teaching can never be boring, since every day with children is full of surprises (good or bad).

Emotions about the teaching process

The emotions arising from the interactions between the student-teachers and their pupils promoted a critical evaluation and reflection of their recent educational decisions during their teacher training, and further stimulated reflection on their future professional decisions. In their words:

> During teaching practice my feelings were varied. Through them I unfolded the tangle of reflection, self-assessment and critical thought, firstly because feelings are not easily forgotten and, secondly, because the reasons for feelings drive us to appreciate the conscious part of teaching, that is my plans and actions in the classroom.

Emotions generated by the student-teachers' actions

The students' feelings could be identified to those which were generated from their own actions, were self-centred and related mainly to their successful teaching:

> My anxiety declined with teaching sessions, at least where pupils could not sense it and I could avoid mistakes due to my anxiety. At the end of each teaching session I reviewed my mistakes, which I kept in mind and tried to amend next time.

Although anxiety about teaching was the predominant feeling in students' journals, especially in the first week of their teaching, 'The first day I went to school, I felt incredibly anxious. When I faced pupils, however, the anxiety was automatically converted into endless energy and creativity', the students' feelings about the teaching experience varied from disappointment to excitement:

> I felt disappointed: the image of a burnt forest comes to my mind as well as the words of a song—'Wond'ring aloud, will the years treat us well? I also felt satisfaction: the image of the sea on a summer night and the words of a song—and it's only the giving that makes you what you are.

Emotions generated by the pupils' reactions

Students' feelings were also generated by the reactions of the pupils. The effect of pupils' responses on them was evident in all the students' journals:

> There were times where I felt a happiness watching my pupils enjoying what they were doing, looking in their eyes and getting the impression that they understood what I taught. This feeling is amazing. There were times though, where I felt disappointed and had not succeeded in my goals.

The affective states evoked by the interaction between students teachers and pupils were not only intense: 'The best feeling I've ever felt was that I gave and received love', but even crucial in their decision to eventually practice teaching as a profession: 'And then, there were the good times, when the pupils were happy, which reinforced my efforts, enhanced my self-efficacy, and made me feel like I was born for the profession.

Future-oriented emotions

At the same time, the students' feelings were future-oriented and related to concerns and worries about the maintenance of their motivation and enthusiasm for teaching:

> What worries me is the distortion of my enthusiasm with the passing of the years and willingness to help children, that is what I now feel before I enter the class. I am worried that classroom daily life will affect me negatively, physically and morally and eliminate my efforts. I am also worried that before my retirement, my younger colleagues will supersede me and I will not be able to give my pupils what a younger teacher can give them.

The students realised that teaching is a profession that someone must really love if (s)he wants to practice it:

> Through teaching practice, I realised that if you don't love your job or children, then it is very difficult to survive in the classroom. Although I never dreamt of being a teacher, I will practice teaching because I love children;

otherwise (s)he has to find an alternative:

> Through teaching practice we 'landed' in the reality of the classroom, and we will have the chance to reconsider our choice, since if we don't like the profession we had better find an alternative which gives us pleasure and fulfilment.

Discussion

The notion of respect for the individuality of our students we, as teacher educators, claim in our lectures is at odds if we do not try to trace the way our student-teachers situate their thinking within the context of their practice. Korthagen (2004) postulates that the essence of helping someone to become a teacher lies in concentrating on the level of his/her concerns. Bearing in mind the criticisms of the personalised concerns-based approach to teacher education, we argue that the

exploration of future teachers' prominent worries, feelings and beliefs evolved during their practice provides the starting point for the amelioration of our teacher training programmes, in terms of the teaching practice. Based on these assumptions, the current study aimed to elicit student-teachers' concerns and preoccupations following their teaching practice in schools. Concerns-based studies until now have been cross-sectional and compared the evolvement of student-teachers' concerns at different levels of their training. The current study focused on their ultimate concerns upon finishing their teaching experience. The study adopted Tillema's (2000) contention that the immersion into practice could have a more adaptive effect on students' personal theories than reflection prior to the practice immersion. The exploration of students' beliefs as a result of immersion into practice further promotes the metacognitive awareness of these beliefs for both student-teachers as growing professionals, and teacher trainers as providers of teaching experiences.

Thus, it was found that when student-teachers were confronted with the reality of teaching, they reconceptualised the picture they had, until then, held of the teaching profession and, in turn, they questioned the image they had of their selves as personalities and as possible teachers. They worried whether they had what Tickle (1999) calls the essential qualities of teachers, such as empathy, compassion, understanding, flexibility, tolerance, love of children, and whether the teaching profession actually suits them, as well as the competencies and skills needed for classroom management. There is a consensus in the literature that the management of student behaviour is the biggest concern of prospective teachers (Moore & Cooper, 1984; Cunningham & Sugawara, 1988; Jones & Vesilind 1995). Classroom management concerned the students in this study, especially in the first week of their teaching practice, in terms of their capacity to handle pupils with learning or behavioural problems. They were not, however, overwhelmed with classroom management concerns, since they shortly found out that the teaching experience and retrospection on their disciplinary decisions helped them obtain a repertoire of coping strategies, and discern the right choice each time. What mostly concerned teachers was their teaching-self as curriculum instructor in a pedagogical and comprehensive manner for all pupils. Again, their most prominent worries were not focused on the efficacy of their teaching methods, which could be easily acquired through practice, but on the development of a criterion-measurement with which they could assess their pupils' acquisition and comprehension of the learning material.

Confronted with teaching, students were also concerned with and reflected on highly personal questions, such as 'what kind of teacher I want to be', or 'what ideals and values teachers have to transmit in their classrooms'. They critically examined the inherent values of teaching, as well as how they themselves will stay committed to the respect of individual differences. They came up with the notion of mission which is inextricably bound up with the profession and the magnitude of responsibility they have towards the new generation. At the same time, however, they came up with the fear of professional fading and the weariness resulting from the repetitive nature of the teaching process.

In the students' journals there was an overwhelming preoccupation with the affective dimension of teaching. Until now, emotions have been absent in teacher reflection, as if teachers think and act but never feel. Although several publications stress the role of affective factors in teaching, teachers have not been supported to reflect on such factors using elaborated strategies (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Emotions such as worry, hope, enthusiasm, boredom, love, affection, anxiety cannot be dispatched from teachers' actions. The current research revealed that students mainly retrospect on their emotions. They retrospect on emotions generated from their selves, as protagonists in a teaching situation, which must end up successfully. They retrospect on emotions generated by their pupils' reactions to their own decisions, what Lortie (1975) called 'psychic rewards', that is the rewards teachers receive when pupils show affection for them and enjoy the learning process. In fact, the emotions created by pupils' responses were so powerful that they influenced students' decisions to practice teaching following their graduation. Surprisingly, students also anticipated their future emotions by the current teaching experience. The preservation of an enthusiasm for teaching and affection for children were their main future-oriented concerns, especially following interactions with older colleagues.

The student-teachers' pattern of concerns: the interplay between self and others; cognition and affection; present, past and future

Although the students' journals referred to the last five weeks of their teacher preparation, the study challenges the linear development of concerns, whether directed outwards to the pupils or inwards towards the self, and argues for a complex and multi-faceted nature of the students' thinking. The students' development followed both an external direction from the teaching subject to caring about their students, and an inner pattern from self-survival to self-improvement. Their concerns shifted as Fuller predicted from self to task, to students, a journey outward; but at the same time they shifted from a personal capacity to manage their classrooms and teach the subjects, to concerns about their capacity to grow as teachers and persons—a journey inward, as Conway and Clark (2003) proved. With the passing of teaching weeks, the students engaged in a progressive process of self-awareness, self-revelation and self-development as persons and professionals, without a clear distinction between these two identities. Indulging in their deeper self, students realised the social, moral and political effects of their actions as teachers on pupils and society in general, broadening the scope of teachers' concerns described by Fuller. Their preoccupation with self is not at odds with the practice of reflective teachers. Reflection requires teachers' continuous observation and monitoring of their own development and learning. It also requires teachers to examine the ways their own beliefs and behaviours influence their interactions with pupils and their stance as political persons. Reflection and consequently reconstruction of the image of self as teachers is the tool for both the novice and experienced to cope with the ambiguity of the teaching profession. It helps to realise

our identity, our actions and the way we change, so that we can deal with our vulnerabilities and defensiveness (Bass *et al.*, 2002).

The study also challenged the prominent role of cognition in teacher education research, and advocated the concurrent interaction of cognition and affect in student-teachers' learning processes. Combs *et al.* (1974) referred to 'confluent education' to describe the dynamic 'flow' of thinking and feeling in the learning process. The student-teachers' emotions about self and pupils, who serve as a reference group to the teaching self, dominated their journals and operated as determinants of their educational choices in their current teaching practice, and as predictors of their future professional decision to teach. Emotions served as stimulants for reflection, and at this point lies their most significant function. While students reconsidered their evolving identity and envisioned themselves as teachers, they concentrated on the affective states their actions generated, to themselves and their pupils. Reflection lay in an interplay of the students' memories, their images of the past, and imagination and visions of the future. In fact, Conway (2001), introducing anticipatory reflection, argues that reflection is not only about looking backward, but also about looking forward. He suggests that looking towards the future with knowledge of the past, from the viewpoint of the present, is an important aspect of novice teachers' experience. The students' words delineated a variety of concerns simultaneously located in the recent past and oriented to the future. They engaged in queries about the capacity to teach effectively during their teaching practicum and the potential to evoke their professional development; the perceptions people have of the teaching profession, and the role and mission the profession actually carries for society; the feelings of enthusiasm and passion they currently have for their pupils and teaching and the fear of fading, lack of motivation and interest which often accompanies the routine of teaching.

Limitations of the study

It is important to note that the students in this study were asked to delineate their teaching experiences through journal writing with no previous practice of this type of writing. Consequently, there were journals which turned out to be random collections of unelaborated thoughts and ideas. The expectation of writing for an audience and for teacher educators in particular, could profoundly influence the content of the journal (Boud, 2001). On the other hand, the journals served as a means to describe the salient matters of teaching experience the students reflected upon, by the end of their teaching practice. Although there is a contention that writing promotes higher level thinking, written reflection does not necessarily progress beyond personal levels of concern to more analytical thoughts about the process of teaching and learning (Hoover, 1994). But even in cases where this actually happens, critical thinking does not necessarily lead to critically informed pedagogy (Trotman & Kerr, 2001); moreover, there is no evidence to indicate whether reflective practitioners are more effective than non-reflective ones (Griffiths, 2000).

From a methodological perspective, the study of journal documentation generates questions regarding the validity and credibility of such practices in relation to other interpretive strategies such as protocols, triangulation or code mapping (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002). The relationship between the ability and willingness to be reflective about professional development and the ability and willingness to write reflectively is still undetermined. Obviously, journal writing is not the only means of promoting students' retrospection of experiences. Interviews, video-assisted reflection and peer cognitive coaching are but a few of the other tools for fostering reflective thought in prospective teachers.

Significance of the findings

The current study revealed the most prominent issues of teaching upon which prospective teachers retrospect, when released from the stress provoked by teaching performance and assignment completion. Instead of attending to the process of prospective teachers' professional learning and development, the study focused on the final outcome of this process. Justification for this choice came from a student's words:

> I blamed myself that I could not appropriately intervene and reduce the tension in the class, but there was no way to observe my attitude from an objective perspective… disappointment was the outcome. Now that the tension has gone and I have had more time to think, I realise that teaching has a totally different dimension.

Further research will follow these students into the first years of their teaching.

It was found that while learning to teach, students engaged in moral, ethical and pedagogical considerations, circling through patterns of cognition and affection, professional identity, desires, motivation, personal interest and professional mission, current, past and long-term orientations, optimism and pessimism about their own capacities and social values, worries and aspirations. The technical matters of teaching were not found to concern these prospective teachers, despite the researchers' contentions about prospective teachers' preoccupations with technical rationality. Zeichner and Liston (1996) suggested that reflective teachers move beyond the question of whether their practice is working, to ethical questions such as how it is working and for whom. They supported teachers to speculate about the values intertwined with their practice, and their own commitment to change. The students in this study received no training on reflective techniques. Nevertheless, based on Zeichner and Liston's assertions, they did ruminate using retrospective and mainly anticipatory reflection, with emotions and feelings being the most prevalent topics of scaffolding. According to a student's journal entries:

> Through teaching practice I had the chance to discover my own stance in education. The dynamic of retrospection and reflection on my theories and thoughts in relation to education in general, and my own stance in particular, was inherent in the repertoire of experience and images which I received through teaching practice.

This finding challenges the notion of reflection as a learning tool with which students must be equipped prior to their teaching experience, and treats reflection as a

learning product or qualification students gain following practice. Critical reflection is considered as a valuable outcome *per se*, and not as a criterion measurement for effective teaching. Such an assertion obviously does not question the systematic process of reflection-oriented learning. It does, however, timely shift student-teachers' reflective training to the end of their teaching experience, since when busy with coursework, it is hard for student-teachers to engage in reflection.

Conclusions

By examining the concerns and reflections of student-teachers' learning experiences in the final stage of their teaching practice, this paper has attempted to contribute to the ongoing discussion of developing effective teaching placements. The acknowledgment of student-teachers' perceptions of their teaching practice further promotes teacher educators' reflection on the organization and evaluation of teacher training programmes. It also promotes a productive discussion between student and teacher educators on the topics which actually concern students. Discussion of this sort could confront some of the reality shock new teachers often face (Brock & Grady, 1997) and may affect teacher retention, since teachers leave the profession due to unrealistic expectations, which could have been alternatively resolved during teacher training. According to Hargreaves (1995), a proper concept of teacher development ought to proceed further than the technical, and acknowledge the moral, political and emotional dimensions of teaching. For teacher educators, an examination of the dilemmas arising from the experience of student-teachers presents an ideal learning opportunity. The analysis of student-teachers' concerns by teacher educators constitutes a very rich source of relevant data on the complex interplay between student-teachers' thoughts, beliefs and emotions, and their experiences during their teaching practice. Student-teachers would benefit from teacher educators following their individual personal and professional conceptualisations of professional learning, and offer them growth-producing experiences through teaching practice (Tang, 2003).

Notes on contributor

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