

An international teaching internship as a significant personal experience in becoming a teacher



A little less balance in new teachers' professional development

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PETER MESKER

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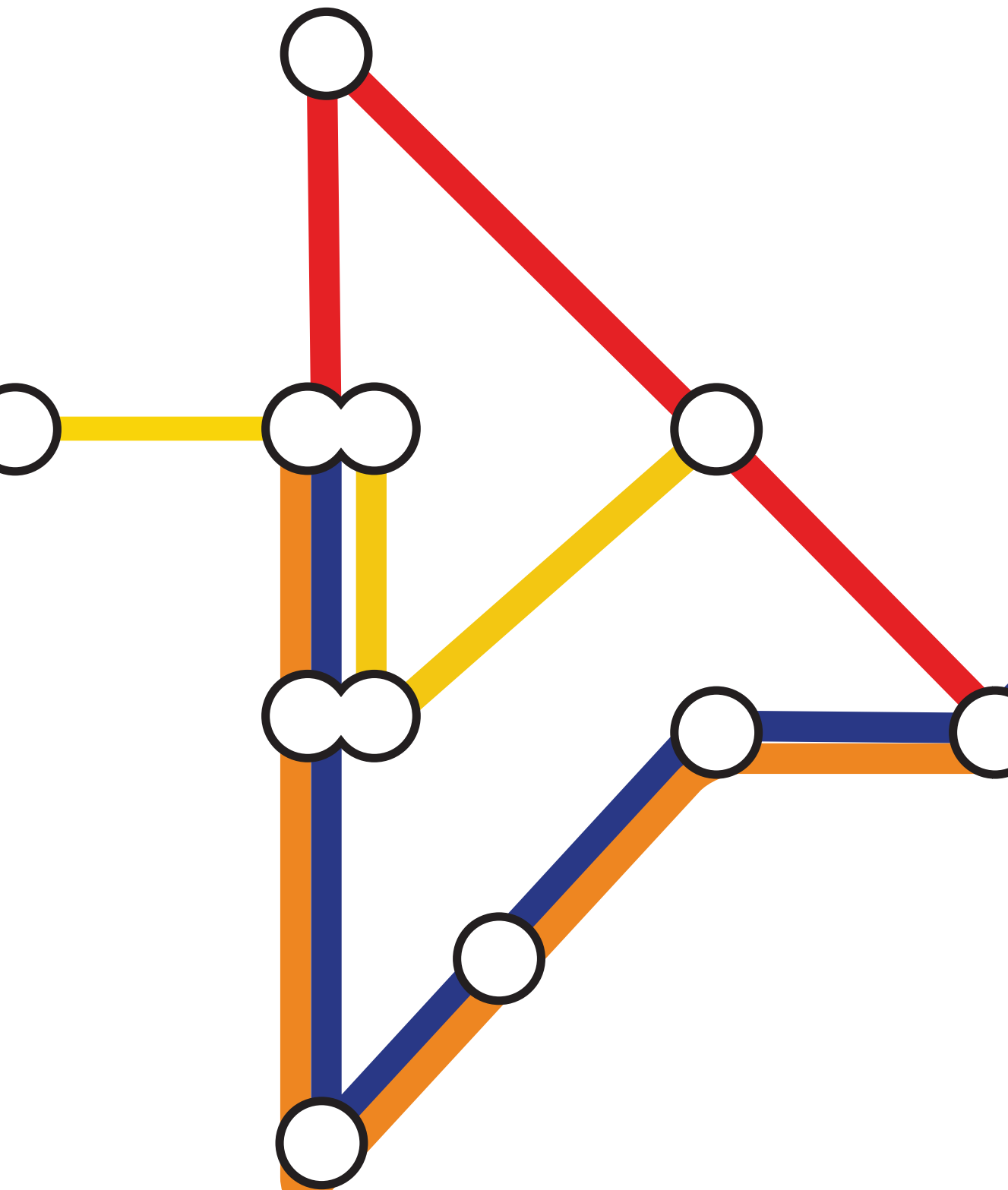
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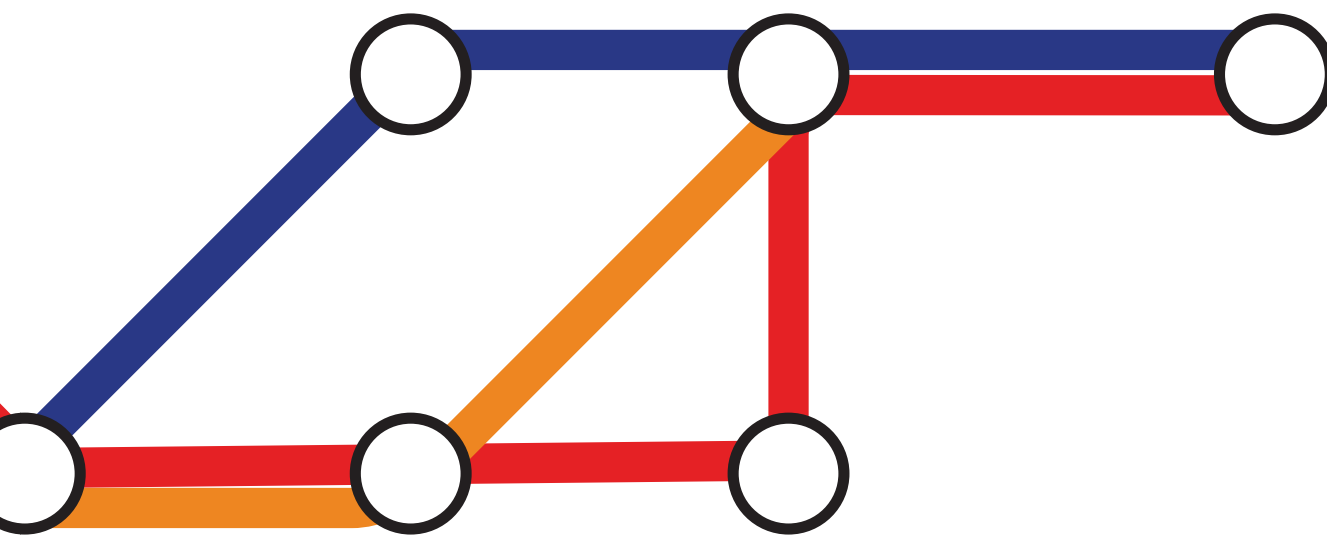
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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION



1.1 Positioning this study

1.1.1 Who I am in how I teach

‘Who I am in how I teach is the message’, according to Geert Kelchtermans (2009, p. 257). Nias (1989, p. 202-203) notes a teacher’s self-image matters to both themselves and their students since, in contrast to other professions, a teacher cannot be separated from their teaching. Britzman (1991, p. 8) has described how learning to teach always has a focus on the self: “it is a time when one’s past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach - like teaching itself - is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become”. Kelchtermans (2009, pp. 260-261) goes on to describe how essential a teacher’s ‘personal interpretative framework’ is within the profession. This framework reflects the basis on which a beginning teacher grounds their personal decisions or judgements for action and answers the questions: ‘how can I effectively deal with this particular situation?’ and ‘why would I work that way?’ (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014, p. 118).

Although teacher educators acknowledge the importance of personal aspects in teaching (Britzman, 2003; Kelchtermans, 2009; Korthagen, 2016; Nias, 1989; Olsen, 2008), in practice they often struggle to determine how to make personal aspects explicit and constructively reflect on these aspects in beginning teachers’ professionalization (Bakker, 2016; Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2010; Korthagen, 2010; Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos 2009; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011; Warnick & Silverman, 2011; Willemse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2008). There is limited empirical and theoretical evidence of how beginning teachers’ perceive their personal concerns, interpretations, or beliefs and reflect on them (Martínez, Castro, Vystrčilová, & Mogliacci, 2017; Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2009; Rots, Kelchtermans, & Aelterman, 2012; Van Kan, 2013). Korthagen (2017, p. 399) argues that for educators to fully understand the process of their students becoming teachers, they have to focus on student teachers’ actual concerns and real experiences, and take the person of the teacher into account by asking: “What do the teachers think, feel, want, what are their ideals, what inspires them, what kind of teachers do they want to be? And above all: What is their potential?” The most obvious example of what Korthagen (2017) describes as a real experience is a teaching internship.

1.1.2 Workplace learning

In 2006, the Dutch Education Professionals Act (Wet op Beroepen in het Onderwijs/BIO) translated the previous teacher qualifications into a list of competences (Kroeze, 2014). One of the main consequences of the BIO was that workplace learning became an important part of teacher education (Kallenberg & Rokebrand, 2006). Workplace learning is a process characterised by work and learning and involves three interacting parties:

the teacher training institute, the school, and the student teacher (Kroeze, 2014; Fuller & Unwin, 2010; Tynjälä, 2008). Teaching internships and school collaborations became key aspects of Dutch teacher training programmes. Workplace learning is organised at secondary or vocational schools and is based upon a close co-operation between university-based teacher educators and the school teachers who gradually become school-based teacher educators (Korthagen, 2017; Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011).

Workplace learning offers various opportunities for educators interested in personal aspects of student teachers' professional development. During teaching internships, student teachers usually begin to understand the aspects of the mandatory knowledge and skills they were taught that they personally value and believe to be useful for their classroom (Alsup, 2006; Biesta, 2014; Kelchtermans, 2009). Teaching internships also function as experiences where student teachers attempt to connect theoretical insights from their teacher training programme with actual practice in meaningful ways to either affirm or reject theories underpinning particular practices (Korthagen, 2010; Horowitz, Darling Hammond, & Bransford, 2005; Tilson, 2017; Zeichner, 2014). Internships give students an opportunity to experiment with teaching activities, or alternative educational ideas. Critical reflections on such experiences can expose implicit beliefs, existing personal practical theories, or tacit knowledge (Eraut, 2000; Kelchtermans, Ballet, Peeters, März, Piot, Robben, & Maes, 2008; Kroeze, 2014; Levin, He, & Allen, 2013; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Girvan, Conneely, & Tangney, 2016; Olsen, 2008). Kroeze (2014) concludes that workplace learning is a key student experience that combines personal development and social interaction, and where the student teacher learns to find his or her position in the field of education.

1.1.3 An international teaching internship as a case

This study uses an international teaching internship as a case to explore how workplace learning influences beginning teachers' personal interpretative frameworks. For several reasons, an international teaching internship can be a relevant case for educators who want to further understand student teachers' personal interpretative frameworks.

First, being exposed to another culture, including one with a disparate and unfamiliar teaching practice, can make personal aspects in teaching more explicit. When a student teacher works and lives without a familiar social network, their existing beliefs and modes of action do not necessarily succeed or become invalid (Cushner & Brennan 2007; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Hofstede, 2005; Marginson, 2014; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007). In a new culture, one lives in a state of disequilibrium with his or her cultural background (Marginson, 2014, p. 12), which frequently triggers a student's contemplation about their home culture and their position in it (English, 2013; Nanda & Warms, 2004; Weaver, 1998). One has to rediscover his or her new role, including their personal 'voice' (Weaver,

1998; Hofstede, 2005, p. 326). These reflections can explicate or sharpen novice teachers' awareness of differences in norms in their personal interpretative frameworks, because their frameworks are also culturally determined (e.g. Chi-Kin Lee, 2016; Jang & Kim, 2010; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Hofstede, 2005; Marginson, 2014; Tam, 2016).

Another reason why studying an international teaching experience can be of value for educators to understand student teachers' personal interpretative frameworks, is the fact that a cross-cultural experience can be an important life experience that involves personal change. People often find their own culture by leaving it (Weaver, 1998). They can also find themselves (Leask, 2008). Students returning from stay abroad frequently describe transformations – especially how the experience has personally changed them (e.g. Montgomery, 2010; Root & Ngampornchai, 2013; Vande Berg, Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012). The idea that a stay abroad can be an important life experience that involves personal development is not new. For example, it was common during early modern times for young adults from European upper classes to make a Grand Tour as part of their education and 'Bildung' (Towner, 1985; Von Humboldt, 2001). Parents expected that an international experience would be a formative experience that would help young adults in the complicated process of growing up by learning about the world and themselves. Meeting 'the other' and being exposed to other cultures, knowledge, or art, were considered important experiences to prepare young adults in their future roles as citizens in society (e.g. Hill, 2012; Verhoeven, 2015). In our modern society, students' motives to stay abroad are similar to earlier times; students describe how they want to learn about themselves, or challenge themselves by living in another culture by stepping outside their comfort zone (Alasuutari & Jokikokko, 2010; De Grosbois, Kaethler, & Young, 2010; Weber-Bosley, 2010).

1.2 A pedagogy of interruption for understanding student teachers' personal interpretative frameworks

1.2.1 Student teachers' personal interpretative frameworks

There is a broad consensus that teachers' interpretations of classroom situations involve continuous subjective and moral judgements (Ball, 2012; Biesta, 2010; Buzzeli & Johnston, 2002; Fenstermacher, 1990; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013; Veugelers, 2010). Biesta (2014; 2017) argues that teachers' personal interpretations and judgements about what is 'good' are in fact essential to the teaching profession. A teacher's personal interpretative framework is described by Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2014, p. 118) as 'a set of cognitions and beliefs that operates as a lens through which they perceive their job situations, give meaning to it and act in it'. A teacher's personal interpretative framework

is based on previous and current experiences and has future implications for their teaching practice (Kelchtermans, 2009). Kelchtermans (2009) describes how a teacher's personal interpretative framework is constructed by two interwoven domains, their professional self-understanding and subjective educational theory.

Teachers' professional self-understanding is an on-going process in sense-making of significant events and the subsequent influence on the self (Kelchtermans, 1993, 2009). Kelchtermans distinguishes six dimensions of professional self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 1994, 2009): self-image, self-esteem, task perception, job motivation, job satisfaction and future perspective. A teacher's subjective educational theory is the personal system of knowledge and beliefs that a teacher uses to make sense of their professional educational framework (Kelchtermans, 2009; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014). Educators who aim to understand new teachers' personal interpretative frameworks, have to view these frameworks as dynamic constructs (Kelchtermans, 2009) with unavoidably subjective and moral dimensions in teaching (Buzzeli & Johnston, 2002; Fenstermacher, 1990; Hansen, 2001; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013).

How teachers interpret critical moments in their classroom has a normative dimension. It includes the question: what is the right thing to do in this particular situation and what does that mean for me as a professional? (Bakker, 2016; Kelchtermans, 2009). In his description of (new) teachers' professionalism and professionalization, Bakker (2016) analyses how teachers continuously make personal interpretations within the educational system by distinguishing instrumental and normative professionalism. Instrumental professionalism means that every teacher needs to be acquainted with the educational system and "needs to master the knowledge and skills of the professional as presupposed by the system" (Bakker, 2016, p. 13). Bakker (2016) argues that another, interrelated aspect in teaching is a teacher's normative professionalism – a teacher knows that in the end she or he will always have to make a professional judgement based upon a subjective interpretation within this system of knowledge and skills (Bakker, 2016, p. 16; Biesta, 2015, p. 75).

1.2.2 A pedagogy of interruption and discontinuity

Several studies have indicated that educators, who want further insight into a novice teacher's personal interpretative framework, should focus on experiences of tension, friction, conflict and concern (Bronkhorst, 2013; English, 2013; Kelchtermans, 2009; Meijer, 2014; Pillen, Beijaard, & Den Brok, 2013). John Dewey contended that experiences filled with confusion, perplexity, error, or frustration lay at the very core of learning (1933; 1938a). Tension and friction between novice teachers' personal concerns and beliefs on the one hand, and the demanding, socializing context of the educational system on the other, are acknowledged as a key aspect in becoming a teacher (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas,

2011; Day, 1999; Loughran, Brown, Doecke, 2001; Meijer, 2014; Olsen, 2008). Studies on novice teacher's professional development describe how novice teachers frequently feel a lack of support and struggle to position themselves in a teaching practice (Avalos, 2011; Rots et al., 2012). Schön (1983; 1987) has characterized these indeterminate, unexpected or problematic situations as the "swampy zones of practice".

Biesta's (2010) concept of a pedagogy of interruption is used in this study to describe how experiences of disequilibrium during an international teaching internship can explicate and influence new teachers' personal interpretative frameworks. An interruption of 'someone's normal ways of being', is a state of disequilibrium, whereby a teacher interacts, hesitates and does not always know how to respond (Biesta, 2012; English, 2013; Marginson, 2014). An international teaching internship has the potential of being an interruptive experience, because of various socio-cultural differences and the fact that student teachers move between disparate practices (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Wenger, 2000).

The idea of doubt, or not knowing, and their connection to learning is an essential aspect of pragmatism that also arises in the thoughts of James (2008a; 2008b), Mead (1964), and Dewey (1925; 1933; 1938a). Biesta (2010) argues that an interruption is an experience wherein teachers (have to) show who they are, as well as their unique position within their profession. Biesta (2014, p. 143) describes this as a key experience of teachers "coming into the world" (see also Arendt, 1958).

The main pedagogical value of experiencing an interruption resides in the essential moment of 'in-between', an opening or gap in the actual experience that marks a limit to someone's existing knowledge or skills and ability, or questions taken-for-granted modes of thought and action (English, 2013; Biesta, 2010; 2012). Biesta (2017, p. 15) has described the realm of the in-between as 'the middle ground', an existential place where "our self-expression encounters limits, interruptions, responses in the interaction with others in the world around us". An interruption thus becomes an opening, or "an educational space in which the learner finds herself bound up in a realm that lies between an encounter with the limits of knowledge and ability, and the new knowledge or ability that is yet to be found" (English, 2013, p. 105). An interruption therefore, has the potential to raise new teachers' awareness of their personal interpretations and move beyond their current abilities (Biesta, 2010; English, 2013; Tsui & Law, 2007). An interruption in a cross-cultural context has an added value because experiencing socio-cultural differences can make new teachers also aware of culturally embedded personal interpretations (e.g. Chi-Kin Lee, 2016; Jang & Kim, 2010; Tam, 2016).

The struggle caused by the encounter with something unfamiliar or unexpected can turn into a constructive stage of learning, inquiry, self-reflection, exploration, or experimentation (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Dewey, 1933; English, 2013; Schön, 1983; 1987; Tsui & Law, 2007). Therefore, educators should consider interruptive experiences as constructive, pedagogical experiences, which they can use for explicating student teachers' personal interpretative frameworks in their professionalization. Educators might even consider deliberately evoking interruptive experiences (Creemers, Kyriakides, & Antoniou, 2013; Dewey, 1933; 1938b; Meijer, 2011; 2014). English (2013) describes how educators often avoid having their students struggle or become distressed, and instead think only of solutions or standardization (see also Biesta, 2014a). Biesta (2014a) argues that experiencing an interruption is part of the inherent risks of education and key educational experiences should not be avoided (see also English, 2013; Kelchtermans, 2009; Meijer, 2014). Whatever strategy a teacher educator chooses, he or she needs to be aware of the fact that educators have an active role, even a responsibility, to enhance new teachers' development in becoming reflective practitioners, because this cannot be left to chance (Dewey, 1933; 1938b; English, 2013; Schön, 1987; 1991). Therefore, teacher educators who want to prepare future teachers to cope with the inherent subjective and moral nature of the teaching profession, have a task that adds in an important way to guiding new teachers in accumulating knowledge and skills (Bakker, 2016; Biesta, 2014a; 2017).

1.2.3 Boundary crossing and (dis)continuity

Experiences of interruption that enhance (student) teachers' self-reflections on their professional practices and personal interpretative frameworks have been described in various ways, for instance, as disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991, 2009), bumpy moments (Romano, 2006), or crises (Meijer, 2011). Key concepts in this study for describing experiences of interruption are boundaries and (dis)continuity. The theory of boundary crossing (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Engeström, Engeström, & Kärkkäinen, 1995; Tsui & Law, 2007) uses the metaphor of a boundary to describe how professionals try to (re) position themselves when moving between alternative practices. According to Akkerman and Bakker (2011), "a boundary can be seen as a sociocultural difference leading to discontinuity in action or interaction. Boundaries simultaneously suggest a sameness and continuity in the sense that, within discontinuity, two or more sites are relevant to one another in a particular way" (p. 133). This case study involves several potential boundaries, i.e., between being a student in teacher education and student teaching experiences, negotiating various socio-cultural differences during student teaching, and transitioning from being a student teacher to a newly qualified teacher.

The discomfort of discontinuity is not a state of mind most people appreciate (Kelchtermans, 2009). Experiencing discontinuity can emphasize one's shortcomings and weaknesses, and include a sense of vulnerability (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Bakker & Wassink, 2015; Kelchtermans, 2009; Zimbardo, 1999). Akkerman and Bakker (2011) describe professionals who experience discontinuity, generally making attempts to manage the obstacles or challenges that exist between those practices to find a position that 'works' for her [or him]. During attempts at management, professionals are challenged to negotiate and integrate elements from various contexts to provide solutions to problems. This is defined as boundary crossing, and can result in individuals finding a renewed state of continuity in which they find their unique way of operating among multiple communities of practice (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Engeström et al., 1995; Tsui & Law, 2007).

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002, p. 153) argue that new insights and developments often arise at the boundaries between practices. Tsui and Law (2007) describe how teachers and other professionals constantly evolve their professional knowledge by acting, thinking and conversing with fellow practitioners. Engeström (2001) describes such professional development as expansive learning triggered by questioning existing practices. Teachers' attempts to cope with discontinuity also gives insights into who they are, including how they are able to critically shape their response during experiences of discontinuity (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; English, 2013). Teachers' agency makes them unique – it is their potential to do something new (Arendt, 1958; 1977; Biesta, 2014b).

In intercultural studies, integrating and negotiating unfamiliar contexts are usually described in terms of acculturation, cultural adaptation, or a 'cultural fit' (e.g., Leong & Ward, 2000; Ward & Chang, 1997). The concept of boundary crossing has the potential of providing educators with a broader and richer perspective, because it integrates cultural, professional and personal dimensions in understanding student teachers' professional development and can be considered to be a dynamic, never-ending, non-linear process (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

1.3 Teachers' personal interpretative frameworks during the transition from student to teacher

1.3.1 Experiential continuity

Both Dewey (1938a) and English (2013) emphasize that openings created when beginning teachers experience an interruption become truly personally significant. The openings occur at a time when the teacher is not only able to reflect upon the nature of the interruption's discontinuity, but when the teacher is able to place the experience within the

context of previous experiences or prior knowledge. Experiential continuity (Dewey, 1938) is a key concept used in this study to understand how a previous international teaching experience continues to influence a new teacher's personal interpretative framework in the two-year transition from student to teacher. In Dewey's perspective (1938a), teachers' professional development is influenced by various experiences in which continuity in experiences matters. Dewey (1938a, p.35) defines an experiential continuum, as "every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them".

The concept of experiential continuity has a dynamic nature, which was particularly useful to understand the dynamics of beginning teachers' personal interpretative frameworks (Kelchtermans, 2009). Teachers' professional self-understanding and interpretations can change over time (Kelchtermans, 2009), because they are influenced by past experiences, including their biography or character and the present socio-cultural context; this has future implications (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Arendt, 1958; Biesta et al., 2015; Goodman, 1988; Kelchtermans, 2009; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). An awareness of an experiential continuum can show newly qualified teachers how they have reflectively come to understand previous experiences (Dewey 1938). This personal awareness contrasts with a lack of reflection leading to routine practices dictated by the past (English, 2013). A reflective practitioner who is conscious of a continuum of experiences also becomes aware of (dis)continuity or transformations in this framework (Dewey, 1938; English, 2013; Schön, 1991), which results in personal and professional growth (see also Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Rodgers & Raiders-Roth, 2006).

1.4 Research questions

This two-year longitudinal study explored the significance of experiencing (dis)continuity during an international teaching experience for understanding (student) teachers' personal interpretative frameworks. Two other key concepts we explored included personal-moral dimensions in teaching (as an essential dimension of a personal interpretative framework) and experiential continuum (how the previous international teaching experience continues to influence the framework during the first year of induction).

The main research question of this thesis is:

- How does an international teaching experience influence a student teacher's and newly qualified teacher's personal interpretative framework in the professional transition from student teacher to teacher?

Dit is een inkijkexemplaar

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