

Towards a professional standard for Dutch teacher educators

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At the annual conference of the Dutch Association of Teacher Educators (VELON) in March 1997, the Dutch Minister of Education suggested that a plan of action for the development of a standard for the teacher education profession should be drawn up. Standards had already been developed for teachers in primary and secondary education and it seemed odd that there was no standard available for the 'teachers of teachers'. Beside that, the VELON considered the minister's suggestion an excellent challenge to improving the professional development of teacher educators as a group.

1. Introduction

The launchpad chosen for its development were the teacher educators themselves: they should feel that they (1) were the owners of the standard and the only way to realise that (2) was to develop the standard in collaboration with members of the professional group itself.

- (1) If teacher educators feel they are the owners of the standard, they will value when they see formulated 'what practitioners need to know and be able to do' (Ingvarson, 1998), and will be willing to use the standard as a point of reference for their own professional development.
- (2) Development started with a working conference held in November 1997. Two documents were discussed: the standard for Dutch teachers and the standard for Master Teacher Educators (American Association of Teacher Educators/ATE, 1996). The plenary and working group discussions resulted in some general ideas about its content. In 1998, a development group of twenty teacher educators (from different types of teacher education institutions and backgrounds) wrote the content of the standard. Its first draft was then discussed during another working conference in January 1999 and the first public version was published in the middle of 1999 and sent to every teacher educator in the Netherlands. Using the working conferences and the development group, the standard was thus developed by the teacher educators themselves, one of our basic starting points.

Right now, we are busy finding out whether or not the standard does indeed benefit the professional development of teacher educators, what role the standard can play in the (self)assessment of teacher educators, and how we can develop a useful system of registration of teacher educators.

In Holland, we have four different types of teacher education: for primary education (a four year course in colleges of education), for lower secondary education (idem), for vocational education (idem) and teacher education for upper secondary education (a one-year post-degree (post-“doctoraal”) university course).

In all, about 3500 teacher educators work at teacher education institutes:

- 1750 for primary education.
- 1050 for lower secondary education
- 360 for vocational education.
- 320 in university teacher education institutes for upper secondary education.

About fifteen percent (550 in all) of the teacher educators are members of the Dutch Association of Teacher Educators (VELON).

The student teachers spend a lot of their time doing teaching practice in the schools. The cooperating schoolteachers supervising them during their teaching practice, play a crucial role in their development. That is why we call these teachers ‘school-based teacher educators’. The standard is also a standard for them. They too were part of the 1998 group that developed the first draft version of the standard, and several of them are cooperating in our efforts to find out if the standard also benefits them.

In this paper, we will first formulate the principles used as starting points for the development of the standard. In chapter 3, we will present the first draft. Next, we will discuss the dilemmas we faced during the development of the standard. In the last chapter we will present our plans for the future.

2. Starting points used in the development of the standard for Dutch teacher educators

In its development, five important starting points were used. (1) The standard would serve two functions (2) one standard was to be developed for all teacher educators, (3) it would have to be a standard for experienced teacher educators, (4) it would have to be written for a situation desirable in the future and (5) the standard would consist of competencies that could be assessed.

The professional standard for Dutch teacher educators has *two important functions*. The first is an internal function serving teacher educators as an instrument in their own professional development and improvement of their functioning as educators. The second is a more external function towards the government, students, clients, etc. which means that the standard serves as an instrument guaranteeing a certain level of professional competency and quality.

Another important starting point was the choice to develop *one standard* for all teacher educators. That means that the content of the standard would have to be useful to teacher educators working in teacher education institutes as well as to schoolbased teacher educators. But, it is also a general standard for all those teacher educators not connected to a specific subject or type of teacher education.

Beside their work as teacher educators, i.e. educating prospective teachers, some teacher educators work in inservice teacher education or do research into teacher education or teaching. These two domains (inservice and research) have been individually included in the standard, because this kind of work demands extra skills on top of the general competencies teacher educators need to have.

Because a standard focusing on quality development is a better guarantor of quality than a standard based on minimal requirements, we decided to develop a standard *for experienced teacher educators*. This means that beginning teacher educators formulate their intention to acquire the competencies formulated in the standard and that experienced teacher educators can use the standard as a point of reference in their efforts to broaden or deepen their professional development.

The standard is being written for a *situation desirable in the future*. For example: the education of student teachers within the institutes and the cooperating practice schools should be closely connected and integrated. At present, that is not always the case, but is something that in our view should be realised in the future. That is why the standard does not make a distinction between institute-based and school-based teacher educators. In future, they will do the same job, although from different perspectives, both needing the same competencies to do that job in a manner satisfactory to the development of the student teachers.

The first draft of the standard consists of competencies that can be *assessed*. This is definitely so for that part of the standard describing the general competencies at an ‘analytical’ level, which means that the competencies are described individually. These can be individually discerned in certain contexts or situations. But in reality, these competencies will always be displayed as integrated competencies. We are at present in the process of formulating situations in which the competencies are shown in an integrated manner. The second difficulty here is if the competencies identified in the introductory part of the standard can be easily assessed.

These are five important starting points chosen for the development of a professional standard for teacher educators in the Netherlands. In 1998, with these starting points in hand, a group of twenty teacher educators (institute-based , school-based , inservice , and those doing research into teacher education) started working on its development . They formulated, reformulated, discussed and discussed over and over again different draft versions . In January 1999, the result of their work was discussed at a working conference, in which about one hundred Dutch teacher educators participated. You will find the result of this process in the next chapter.

3. The first draft of the professional standard for Dutch teacher educators

a. THE FOUNDATIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL COMPETENCIES

Teacher educators provide educational services to a teacher education institute. The teacher educator's **core task** is *'to enable students to develop into competent teachers'*.

A teacher educator can also be expected to contribute towards the ongoing education of certified teachers or to contribute towards the research efforts on teaching and learning processes.

Teacher education is *vocational* education, in which the educator always works at the interface between his own institute and the world of work and school. This is expressed in the following three levels: A good educator:

- has insight into his pupils' development
- facilitates and supervises the student teacher's development
- takes charge of his own professional development.

Teacher educators formulate their own educational vision, one which is linked to the real world. They are able to adapt this vision to the pedagogical views of their institute, and to communicate this clearly to colleagues and students. Their educational vision must therefore be outward-looking.

The work of professional teacher educators also demands a certain disposition. The following is true of all five competency areas described in the next section. A good educator:

- is open to others and is a good listener
- dares to take risks and takes initiatives
- can offer feedback and is himself open to it
- stands by his views and can argue them convincingly
- is dedicated, committed and involved
- strives to solve problems with tact and diplomacy.

As a specific professional group, teacher educators work according to the following criteria:

- take, as a starting point, the specific practical problems and concerns experienced by teachers and student teachers, including those of the subject matter being taught

- is oriented towards the stimulation of systematic reflection (NB: this reflection is directed towards acquiring subject knowledge, establishing routines, seeking professional growth, etc.)
- makes deliberate use of both the interaction between the educator and individual students and between the students themselves
- works in an integrated manner, both with regard to the integration of theory and practice and the integration of different disciplines
- acquires and maintains knowledge from a variety of sources.

These criteria will also point to the kind of content of the competencies listed below.

These attitudes and criteria mean that the teacher educator must be prepared to take and develop initiatives together with his students in all competency areas. The educator considers the student as a partner qualified to contribute towards the development, implementation and evaluation of his own education and the ongoing development of the educator. Teacher educators must also be a model in all five competency areas. This means, for instance, that they must put into their own pedagogical behaviour all that they consider to be important.

b. GENERAL COMPETENCIES

The five competency areas are:

1. Content competencies
2. Pedagogical competencies
3. Organizational competencies
4. Groupdynamic and communicative competencies
5. Developmental and personal growth competencies

The last competency area listed is a prerequisite for the first four; it is a 'meta-competency' on which the first four competencies depend.

Each competency area comprises a number of specific skills. For those skills particularly characteristic of teacher education work (as opposed to teaching), the corresponding subsection numbers have been underlined.

As in all professional walks of life, teacher educators must also be capable of integrating ICT into all their activities. This applies, for instance, to the creation of a digital learning environment for students (see 2.2), maintaining a network of contacts (see 3.1) and keeping abreast of developments taking place in the profession itself (see 1.2 and 5.1).

b.1. Content competencies

The teacher educator is able:

- 1.1. to acquire and maintain knowledge and skills to do with his own discipline (e.g. the content being taught, content pedagogy, educational theory)
- 1.2. to integrate the complexity of teaching practice and the content of one's own discipline with elements from various other disciplines, such as pedagogy, educational theory, learning and developmental psychology, and subject matter pedagogy and subject content
- 1.3. to translate the developments taking place in one's own discipline and in the field of education into the vocational preparation of students and the continuous professionalization of (prospective) teachers

b.2. Pedagogical competencies

The teacher educator is able:

(design)

- 2.1. to collaborate with colleagues on the preparation, implementation, evaluation, modification and renewal of course curricula
- 2.2. to create a stimulating learning environment for students and course participants

(action)

- 2.3. to differentiate between different (student teacher and) course participants and monitor them along their specific developmental routes towards teaching competence
- 2.4. to link different teaching situations with the appropriate pedagogical insights
- 2.5. to make the used pedagogical approach transparent for the students and to discuss the pedagogical options with them

(evaluation)

- 2.6. to develop and implement assessment tests of vocational skills, offer students feedback on their study progress, and assess students' capabilities for the teaching profession
- 2.7. to stimulate students to reflect on their experiences and to assess themselves on their own capabilities for the teaching profession

b.3. Organizational competencies

The teacher educator is able:

- 3.1. to maintain a network of relevant professional contacts, both within and outside the world of education
- 3.2. to actively contribute towards the development and implementation of the organization's outlook and policy
- 3.3. to work with others in multi-disciplinary, self-directed teams

b.4. Groupdynamic and communicative competencies

The teacher educator is able:

- 4.1. to deal with young adults and accomplished teachers
- 4.2. to cope with processes within groups of students, teachers and colleagues
- 4.3. to empathize with those he works with, and to provide free rein, monitoring, or confrontation, according to their needs

b.5. Developmental and personal growth competencies

The teacher educator is able:

- 5.1. to evaluate with colleagues new developments in the field of education and in the area of teacher education and to incorporate these into his educational behaviour repertoire
- 5.2. to reflect systematically on his own pedagogical approach and (teaching) behaviour towards students, colleagues and others important to the education institute
- 5.3. to make his own learning process visible to colleagues and students

c. DOMAIN-SPECIFIC SKILLS

Those engaged in inservice education

Teacher educators engaged in inservice education must also be able:

- to adapt quickly and effectively to the specific demands of rapidly changing contract teaching situations
- to translate demand into an appropriate offer
- to take into account the interaction between the course participants and the organization
- to deal with processes of change and resistance to change.

Those engaged in research

Teacher educators engaged in research must also be able:

- to contribute towards the production of knowledge in the field of teacher education, and to elicit and sustain discussion between the groups relevant to this education on the basis of the research results obtained
- to supervise teachers and student teachers in their own investigations and research into teaching practice

4. Dilemmas

In chapter 2, we have already explained the starting points we used and the choices we made while working on the standard for Dutch teacher educators. Making these choices was not always easy. On the one hand, some choices just had to be made to keep the development process going, on the other hand there is always ‘another side’. In this chapter we want to discuss some of the dilemmas we were confronted with during the process of developing the standard . Some of the questions were:

- Should the content of the standard be developed by experts or ‘normal’ teacher educators?
- How specific should the standard be?
- What is the core task of the teacher educator: initial teacher education with or without inservice education?
- Should there be a connection/ link with certain views on how student teachers learn best?
- One standard or different standards?
- Present or future situation ?
- Standard for each individual teacher educator or for a team of teacher educators?
- Professional development or external guarantee?

Working with these dilemmas and trying to find answers was the most challenging and exciting part of the whole process. And the discussion is still going on. What we have written down here is where we stand at the moment or the decision we have made for the moment. It may well change in a few months!

There is one choice we made at the very beginning, which has never changed and is very unlikely ever to change: the teacher educators themselves are responsible for the formulation of the content of the standard. Whichever competencies are chosen and however they are formulated is completely up to the profession itself, because that is the only way in which they can feel it as their product, in which it is recognisable for them and in which they have sense of involvement in it.

Other choices were less easy to make. We have said from the beginning that the standard should not exceed two pages. Standards for teachers developed in Holland in the first half of the 90's were between 60 and 100 pages! Very specific and detailed, so that hardly anybody used them. We gave ourselves the task to formulate a standard of a few pages. We have almost succeeded, the standard is four pages, but that is because some people want more specification because otherwise 'they do not understand what you mean by certain competencies'. But the longer we make it, the less people will use the standard. A solution could be to make an electronic version, also called a 'Web-version'. In that case, if you want some more information, you can 'click' on a certain competency and more information comes to the screen.

A very interesting discussion is around the question 'What is the teacher educator's core task: initial teacher education or inservice education?'. At our last working conference in January 1999, one of the invited/guest speakers stated very clearly that inservice education is a core task of teacher educators. In doing that kind of work, the teacher educator keeps in touch with developments in the field of education and receives feedback from the teachers in the field on what was useful and what was missing in their teacher education programmes. The problem is that this viewpoint generates much resistance with a large number of teacher educators in Holland, who find inservice education difficult and work for specialists. So we have finally decided to leave inservice education out as a core task and have made it a 'domain-specific competency'.

We found it extremely difficult to make a choice for one specific view on how student teachers learn or develop best. For a long time, we struggled with this problem until one of the teacher educators in what we called our 'resonance-group' came up with the solution which is now part of the foundation of the standard: a part of the professional identity of the teacher educator is that he or she chooses a certain educational vision and that the teacher educator is able to communicate this vision clearly. Which vision someone chooses is his or her own responsibility.

Here we have discussed some of our dilemmas and have given the reasons why we have chosen a certain solution. For the moment, we are quite satisfied with the solutions we have found. We also think we have found the right balance between a standard that reflects the present situation enough for people to recognize themselves in the standard, and a standard which also has enough future in it to act

as a challenge to more experienced teacher educators to try and improve towards a new situation. Since we are at present trying out the standard , we hope to discover whether or not this is really the case.

We are still working to find answers to some of the questions. We will deal with those questions in the next chapter.

5. Plans for the future

So far, we have developed one single standard for all teacher educators in the Netherlands: whether working within schools as ‘school-based teacher educators’ or as teacher educators working in teacher education institutes and teaching a specific subject like educational theory or mathematics, etc. We have developed a general set of competencies with only a limited differentiation regarding the context in which people work: initial teacher education, inservice teacher education and research into teacher education and teaching.

The important questions are: is there a difference because the field the student teachers are preparing for is different i.e. primary education or upper secondary education, and is it necessary to formulate subject-specific competencies i.e. competencies specific for teacher educators e.g. in physics or foreign languages? To find an answer to these two questions is one of the tasks we have given ourselves for the future.

Another such task is to find out if an individual teacher educator can embody all the different competencies. Some people say: the standard should be applied to a team of teacher educators and the team should look and see what competencies they lack and who is willing and capable of contributing these competencies. For the moment, we are unable to look at the competencies as separate entities. If e.g. an individual teacher educator works with a group of students returning from an intensive practice period wanting all kinds of practical questions to be discussed and dealt with, then this individual teacher educator will need all of the competencies to turn the session into a useful experience for them . Still we are planning to next year try out the standard with a team of teacher educators and see how and if the standard can help to give some people certain specific competencies.

We have already discovered that the standard is useful for the professional development of individual teacher educators.

For several months now we we have been looking for instruments which may fulfil the “double function” of the standard: the (internal) professional development of teacher educators and the external guarantee of a certain level of professional quality .

A first step will consist of the development of criteria, to be added to the set of competencies. They will be formulated as e.g. “in this or that situation the teacher educator acts as follows..., with the following result ...”. It is necessary that teacher educators take part in the development of these criteria. The result may be that besides the development of general criteria, teacher educators are formulating criteria which are relevant to themselves in their own specific situation. By putting this into practice and by communicating with each other about these criteria, the common base of what a professional teacher educator is or should be will be strengthened.

The next step will be the development of an assessment procedure strongly appealing to the professional responsibility of the individual teacher educator. For the moment, we are thinking of a procedure consisting/ made up of a mix of self-diagnosis, feedback by colleagues, the development of a personal professional development plan, coaching and final assessment by peers.

In the meantime, we are developing the setting up of a register for teacher educators.

Those who have gone through the assessment procedure and match some more formal criteria (e.g. enough work-experience) can be certified as a registered teacher educator.

First ideas on how to cope with this were the subject of a discussion at a conference we held at the end of last January.

So far, one of the most important results of our own participation in the process of development and assessment is that it has made us realise that clarifying and working with standards and continuously making an effort to achieve them is perhaps more important to the professional quality of teacher educators than the mere possession of a fixed set of standards.

Besides, the world of education and teacher training is changing rapidly. We think this makes it necessary that professional standards are revised every two years and that certification is itself for a limited period. In turn, members of the profession should be aware of the continuous need to screen and update their standards and professional competencies. Should they fail to do so, , they will lose their right to ownership and before long standards will be imposed upon the profession by others .

6. Literature

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