Supporting Student Teachers’ Reflections on Teaching English in the Netherlands

Kazuaki NEKODA

This study aims to explore how teacher educators in the Netherlands support student teachers’ reflections on practice teaching in school. Over the past few decades, the realistic approach of teacher education has become popular. In the process of professional development in teaching, the role of reflection skills is emphasised for student teachers to become independent and self-directed practitioners; therefore, teacher educators are expected to provide appropriate questions to support student teachers’ reflection. The ALACT model (Action, Looking back on the action, Awareness of essential aspects, Creating alternative methods of action, and Trial) in the realistic approach facilitates this process. Based on recorded data from interviews and after-class conferences, it was revealed that teacher educators provided a variety of questions to help student teachers contemplate essential aspects of their own teaching. Additionally, this approach would function well when the policy of teacher development was shared between teacher educators and student teachers in trusting relationships.

Key words: teacher education, practice teaching, reflection, realistic approach, the Netherlands

1. Introduction

This paper aims to explore how teacher educators can be involved in student teachers’ professional development in foreign language teaching. The importance of reflection during professional development has been widely admitted and applied to many fields, including teaching. The criticism of technical rationality in Schön (1983) or of the research, development, and diffusion (RD & D) model made us aware that teaching is more than applying theoretical knowledge to practice, and we need to understand its complexities and dynamic nature. It indicates that the sources of professional development are also embedded in teachers’ classroom experiences. In terms of experience-based learning, Kolb and Fry (1975) and Kolb (1984) present an experiential learning cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, and Wubbels (2001), who advocated the so-called realistic approach, also emphasised the role of experience and reflection, but criticised that Kolb’s model sees the cycle as an ‘autonomous process leaving little room for guided learning’ and ‘overemphasises the role of abstract concepts at the cost of concrete and more individual concepts, images, feelings, or needs’ (p. 43). I would like to adopt Korthagen’s view, since I focus on how teacher educators can support student teachers’ reflection, describing two concrete after-class conference cases. In the
context of practice teaching, where many student teachers feel nervous about instruction and classroom management, guidance from their teacher educator is necessary to support their experience, including the emotional aspects. This paper gives an overview of the realistic approach with a focus on the ALACT model, reports the interview results, and describes student teachers' reflections with transcriptions of after-class conferences to explore how the ALACT model works in the context of English teaching in the Netherlands.

2. What is the ALACT model?

The realistic approach to teacher education emphasises experience and reflection. Learning comes from student teachers’ own experience and it cannot be imparted as knowledge by experienced teachers. In this context, the role of teacher educators is to facilitate student teachers’ reflection to make the best of their teaching experience. The realistic approach proposes ideal steps for reflection, collectively called the ALACT model (Korthagen, 1985; Korthagen et al., 2001, p. 44). ALACT stands for the stages of the reflection process: (1) Action, (2) Looking back on the action, (3) Awareness of essential aspects, (4) Creating alternative methods of action, (5) Trial. The role of teacher educators is to help student teachers go through this process by providing them appropriate comments and questions at each stage. Korthagen et al. (2001) provides the following questions to promote reflection (see Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 5 of the previous cycle (= phase 1 of the present cycle):</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. What did I want to achieve?</td>
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<td>2. What did I want to pay particular attention to?</td>
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<td>3. What did I want to try out?</td>
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<td>Phase 2 (looking back):</td>
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<td>4. What were the concrete events?</td>
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<td>- What do I think that the students wanted, did, thought, felt?</td>
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<td>Phase 3 (awareness of essential aspects):</td>
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<td>5. What is the connection between the answers to the aspects mentioned in question 4?</td>
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<td>6. What is the influence of the context/the school as a whole?</td>
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<td>7. What does that mean for me?</td>
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<td>8. What is the problem (or the positive discovery)?</td>
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<td>Phase 4 (alternatives):</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. What alternatives do I see? (solutions or ways to make use of my discovery)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. What do I resolve to do next time?</td>
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</table>

Figure 1. Questions to promote reflection according to the ALACT model
(Korthagen et al., 2001, p. 210)

The questions in phase 1 emphasise the importance of setting clear goals and taking measures to achieve them. As reflection is a continuous cycle, phase 5 of the previous cycle is the starting point of the present cycle. The questions in phase 2 include four aspects (wanting, acting, thinking, feeling) and help student teachers look back on their own teaching from both the teacher’s and the learners’ point of view. Teachers often
need to make impromptu decisions depending on the learners’ responses, so student teachers may feel panicked or confused when the learners respond unexpectedly. However, such a ‘crisis’ could be a vital moment for student teachers to experience the dynamic nature of teaching. The questions in phase 3 help student teachers focus on essential aspects of their own teaching. In this phase, Korthagen et al. (2001, p. 122) uses the word ‘confrontation’ to express identifying discrepancies between their ideal and real selves, verbal and nonverbal expressions, what they say and do, how they see themselves and how the teacher educators perceive them, and so on. This is a necessary step to prevent the series of reflections in phase 2 from remaining superficial. The questions in phase 4 promote careful choice of alternative actions, which is important because student teachers tend to select the first choice they think of without considering other possibilities.

The realistic approach does not ignore the role of knowledge. Korthagen et al. (2001) explains the differences between episteme (scientific understanding; Theory with a capital T) and phronesis (practical wisdom; theory with a small t), and emphasises the importance of phronesis for teacher education. He insists that episteme, characterised as abstract, objective, and propositional knowledge, can be used as an instrument for exploration of the student teachers’ perceptions in terms of generating questions, point of view, and arguments; however, it is not ‘real’ in itself. The student teachers do not need a collection of conceptual knowledge, but concrete teaching experience through which they develop perceptual knowledge. Thus, it is often said that teacher development is mainly dependent on a large amount of teaching experience, which gradually evolves into phronesis. In other words, in the realistic approach, theory should be something to be connected with concrete experience and interests. In this process, reflection questions in the ALACT model help student teachers deepen the meaning of their own experience. Teacher educators need to understand the nature of professional development and avoid forcing their knowledge and ideas on student teachers.

In Korthagen et al. (2001, pp. 89–90) some evaluative studies that support the realistic approach are mentioned. Luijten, Marinus, and Bal (1995) and Samson and Luijten (1996), are national evaluation studies carried out by an external research office, which report that graduates who followed the realistic approach scored remarkably better in preparation for the teaching profession than those who followed average programs. For the issue of bridging the gap between theory and practice, Koetsier, Wubbels, and Korthagen (1997) reported that 86% of the respondents who graduated between 1987 and 1991 considered their preparation program as relevant or highly relevant to their present work as a teacher. Hermans, Créton, and Korthagen (1993) illustrate this finding with more qualitative data of an experiment with a group of 12 student teachers, all of whom reported a seamless connection between theory and practice. Although the realistic approach has been accepted positively, it is difficult to find relevant case studies which describe interactions between teacher educators and student teachers in the field of second language teaching. Therefore, this paper focuses on English lessons and interprets what occurs at after-class conferences.

3. Data collection

In preparation for data collection, I visited Amsterdam in September 2015 to build rapport and get informed consent from student teachers and teacher educators who were willing to participate in this study. I explained to the student teachers that this
study would not aim to evaluate their teaching performance but to describe how they learn by reflecting on their own teaching with the help of teacher educators. This helped to elicit their natural performance both in class and in after-class conference.

I visited secondary schools in the area of Amsterdam in March 2016, observed English lessons conducted by three student teachers, and voice-recorded two after-class conferences between teacher educators and student teachers. I also interviewed five teacher educators and asked them what kind of comments or questions they often provide their student teachers, and asked the student teachers how they feel about the way they are coached. The language used in the after-class conferences and interviews was English, which is a second language (L2) for them, but there was no language problem for the participants as they have high level of proficiency. The recorded data was transcribed by a specialised company and some extracts from the transcription will be shown in the following sections.

4. How do teacher educators support student teachers’ reflection? (interview summary)

All the teacher educators I interviewed emphasised the importance of student teachers’ continuous reflection for professional development. In the Netherlands, reflection skill (number 7 in Figure 2) is officially required for a teaching qualification, which is based on the seven competences developed by the Association for the Professional Quality of Teachers (SBL). Reflection skill is regarded as a driving force of the ALACT model in the sense that reflection generates meaning from experience. In the realistic approach, learning is embedded in personal experience, since it is considered important for student teachers to explore what is to be learned from their experience. By including reflection skill for a teaching qualification, it means that the student teachers are responsible for their own development beyond the stage of practicum.

Areas from number 1 to 4 (in Figure 2) are required skills when teachers work with students. Teachers need to provide a safe and comfortable learning environment with good communication skills and open-minded attitudes, and provide learning opportunities in an appropriate way, including classroom management. Areas 5 and 6 (in Figure 2) are required skills to work effectively with colleagues, parents, and other school supporters in the region.

All the institutes offering teacher training programs in the Netherlands use these competences as guidelines for their educational program, and student teachers are assessed on whether they have developed appropriate skills in those areas. In this context, teacher educators need to have the coaching skill to promote student teachers’ reflection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey of competences</th>
<th>with students</th>
<th>with colleagues</th>
<th>with the working environment</th>
<th>with him/herself</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedagogical</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expert in subject matter and teaching methods</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisational</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 2. Seven competences for teacher qualification (SBL, 2004)
characterised by skills for asking questions, sharing experience, and providing effective feedback for student teachers’ on-going development.

What kind of questions do teacher educators often pose? In response to this question, they gave the following examples:

- What was the goal of your lesson plan?
- Do you remember when ...? / How can you explain ...? / Why did you do ...? / How did you feel ...?
- Can you explain what happened ...? (event + consequence)
- What kind of behaviour would you like to see from your pupils?
- What could you change in order to ...? / What would you change + why?

These questions are similar to those in Korthagen et al. (2001), which indicates that the principle of the ALACT model is widely shared among teacher educators in the Netherlands. One teacher educator stated that he uses those questions to point out crucial moments and asks for student teachers’ own experiences of these moments.

Questioning skill is obviously important when we know that sharing experience is not automatic, even if teacher educators attend and observe the student teachers’ lessons. Many teacher educators noted that they start with sharing what happened in class with their student teachers, and then let them explain their teaching behaviour in relation to their intentions and feelings. Many teacher educators also mentioned that they carefully control conversation so that they do not force their interpretation on their student teachers. One of the teacher educators stated:

I ask her questions and I ask her to reflect on the comments that I am giving to make sure that it’s not just my opinion because teaching is a very personal job as well … and my interpretation can be very different from what the trainee is experiencing in front of the classroom and it doesn’t make me right.

We should pay attention to how teacher educators give feedback to student teachers. One teacher educator stated that he tries not to provide the solutions immediately but instead asks the right questions to provide his student teacher with an opportunity to figure out which solution best fits the situation. Another teacher educator noted that he gives indirect tips or guidance if his student teacher cannot come up with a solution. In that case, he aims to provide some tips that are suitable according to the student teacher’s personality traits. Many teacher educators agreed that they should avoid making student teachers copy them with regard to their individual teaching behaviours.

It is understood that teacher educators must enhance student teachers’ motivation. They give compliments when they notice any improvement and try to mention the good parts of the lesson during after-class conferences. Positive feedback is important not only for maintaining the student teachers’ motivation but also for developing their individual strengths. Of course, this does not mean that only positive feedback is necessary. Student teachers themselves should be led to discover what they need to modify or overcome in their teaching. Most student teachers faced similar difficulties such as classroom management, improvising, motivating learners, keeping track of time, differentiation, using the target language, and so on. They are encouraged to seek solutions by themselves with some advice or tips given by their coaches. One student teacher gave the following comments about the way she is coached.
My coach has given me the opportunity to grow. He allows me to make mistakes and does not correct them all at once. He asks me what I want so that I will become the teacher I would like to become.

I actually like it because one of the competences is to be a reflective teacher ... you have to be able to reflect on your own, teach on your own, prepare materials on your own, and everything basically ... Before he gives any advice or any compliments, he makes me think about my own behaviour. And sometimes I see what I did wrong or what I should have done differently. So, I really like this way ... What I also like about it is that he starts to explain things he has seen, and then he tells me what went well, and then he tells me one or two things I should improve.

The first excerpt shows that the teacher educator respects the student teacher’s image of the ideal teacher and thinks much of her desire during professional development. This would enhance motivation and make her feel responsible for her own development. The second excerpt shows that she is well aware of the importance of reflection skills and is satisfied with the way she is coached in that she has been given plenty of opportunities to reflect on her own teaching. For this kind of coaching to function properly, teacher educators and student teachers need to share common policies for professional development. If the student teacher had expected to receive quick solutions, she would not have been satisfied with her teacher educator’s coaching. In this sense, the official teacher competences in the Netherlands provide a common basis for teacher education with which teacher educators and student teachers agree on what is important in teaching. To further explore the coaching process, we will study two after-class conference cases in the following section, and see how teacher educators can support student teachers’ reflection.

5. How do teacher educators support student teachers’ reflection? (after-class conference case studies)

5.1. Case 1

Olivia (fictitious name) taught reading in the third year class (age 14–15). The text was ‘The Pardoner’s Tale’ from The Canterbury Tales (Marcia Williams, 2008, Walker Books). She set goals to make the students understand the story and discuss its moral. After she explained who a pardoner is with the historical background, she asked the students, as a pre-reading activity, to think about the meaning of the proverb ‘The love of money is the root of all evil’. She asked them two related questions, ‘In what situation is the desire for money evil or harmful?’ and ‘When does the desire seem normal or legitimate to you?’, but the students did not seem to understand how to answer these questions. She tried to help them write at least one or two sentences, but moved onto a reading session without giving them an opportunity to share or present their opinions in class. She was satisfied with her lesson as a whole, but wondered why the students found it difficult to understand the story.

Coach: And the things, that part which you think they have not understood, what went wrong there?

Olivia: I don’t know, I think my instructions could have been more clear. I think, it
is also related to their age ... They are still teenagers and money does play a part, but they don’t have a known income, they don’t really... it is all about hanging out with friends. Perhaps that is what went wrong. So, they haven’t really reached that stage in life where money can really become a destructive force.

Coach: How do you think you can make this achievable? You wanted to explain and you tried to do so, but it didn’t work?

Olivia: No, most were confused and ...

Coach: So, it means your position was not ... you did not need that, you needed something else.

Olivia thought the students had difficulties because her instruction was not clear enough and they were not familiar with the topic. However, her coach tried to widen the scope of reflection by urging her to see the problem from a different point of view.

Coach: What went wrong, if I may come back to that part, you said you did not explain, you were not clear. No, you were clear, but not to them. The level was important here and the level does not come from you as a teacher, the level comes from them. Throw the ball and let them explain ... that is why there was unrest and how did you feel when there was unrest?

Olivia: I was confused.

Coach: I know, because I know you very well, even your voice changed.

Olivia: Really?

In fact, Olivia was puzzled when some students told her that they could not understand the story at all. Therefore, she asked one student to summarise the story, but the student did it so fast that the others could not catch up, which further confused them. Olivia knew that she was confused but was surprised to know that her tone of voice unintentionally changed. The coach continued to describe the situation at that moment and led her to the essential point of discussion.

Coach: There was a kind of worry in that voice when you said, ‘Never mind guys, never mind, don’t talk all together’ and then you started defending yourself by explaining the story. So don’t worry, I will give you the piece of cake. This is my piece of cake. That is what you wanted to do, but it does not work like that ... You can just ask them questions ... But when you just started like that, ‘Okay, okay, don’t talk all together’, and then you came up with your explanation of the story, they were not quiet.

Olivia: No.

Coach: No, because that was not what they were looking for ... Olivia: Well, I didn’t really feel panicky, but I was confused as to why... what happened here? I don’t understand why they didn’t understand.

Coach: That is the whole point of it.

The coach’s intention was to make Olivia understand the gap between what the students wanted to do and what she wanted to do. She was given the chance to think of the true meaning of the students’ behaviour. In this case, the students became noisy when she started explaining the story because they wanted to admit that they understood some
parts of the story and wished to share them with other students rather than be given a perfect summary by the teacher. When she realised that she could not accept that students did not understand the story, the coach praised her observation because she had reached the stage of ‘awareness of essential aspects’ in the ALACT model.

Coach: Anything you would like to modify for next time? In case you are supposed to give exactly the same lesson in another class, what are you going to modify or adjust?

Olivia: The pre-reading activity. I think I would use your feedback and instead of just asking for students to think about this proverb, I would ask them to think about or to replace greed with anything they think might be the root of all evil and allow them to share this with other students. It wasn’t part of my lesson plan to ask a student to summarise the story. I did it on purpose to help the students that didn’t understand the story ... but they were still lost ... So, perhaps I would change that as well.

Coach: So, the participation of the pupils?
Olivia: Yes.

Olivia proposed alternative actions for better teaching, reminded by her coach's suggestion, which emphasises students' participation. She would like to give the students more opportunities to share their ideas about 'the root of all evil' as preparation for reading the story. She did not provide alternative actions regarding how to ensure the students' comprehension, but she started to think of a different approach because she realised through experience that asking a bright student to summarise the story is not sufficient regarding the involvement of the other students in successful reading comprehension. Of course, this is only one example of Olivia's continuing reflection, but accumulation of such experience would help her develop her confidence in teaching.

The coach asked some other questions in this conference:

- Do you think you have achieved the objectives or goals of the lesson?
- What did you do to achieve that?
- Were you happy about this class?
- What were the students supposed to do about the last movie?

Olivia was happy to clarify what she had achieved and what she had not, and seek alternative actions based on her understanding of the essential aspect revealed in this lesson. The coach's last question is also related to the essential aspect, students' participation. In the final part of her lesson, she showed an animated version of the story without giving the students any task, but noticed, through the conference, that she should have given the students a reason to watch it to promote their participation.

5.2. Case 2

Emily (fictitious name) taught grammar in the first year class (age 12-13). The target was to make the students understand the form, meaning, and functions of the modal verb *can/could*. In the first part of the lesson, she put up grammar explanations on the screen with a list of functions and example sentences. The students started to copy them in their notebook. The coach asked her how she felt at that time.
Coach: Okay, and then you start your explanations. You are happy with the explanations?
Emily: A bit.
Coach: Okay, a bit. What did you like about it?
Emily: It was clear, but maybe the first slide was a bit too much, so I was not so happy about that. I thought ‘can and could’ would be easier for them because they already use it a lot, but instead, because I put all the uses and functions on the board, I think I made them a little bit less sure about it.
Coach: Okay, would it help to give them example sentences before they start to let them have more confidence because they were very panicky in their notes?
Emily: I think that could help.

The coach started by asking questions instead of giving comments, a typical feature of conferences based on the ALACT model. Emily thought the target grammar was easy for the students, but seemed to have felt some uneasiness among the students from their responses. Since the coach positively evaluated Emily’s reflection, which had reached the essential aspect of this activity, he continued the conversation by providing an example action to deal with the situation.

In the latter part of the lesson, Emily asked the students to make example sentences with *can/could*, which express the meaning of ability, permission, request, possibility, and so on. The next excerpt is from when they discussed the way she asked questions.

Coach: What happens when you only ask one student for an example?
Emily: The rest are just not participating.
Coach: Yes, so once you are done with a segment, ask everybody. Try to come up with an example and then grab two, three, four, five students.
Emily: Yes, like I did at the end.
Coach: Yes, like you did at the end, but always give them ample time to think, because not everybody processes the information as fast as you might ... they will have one or two examples in their answer and their notes as well.

The coach’s question helped Emily recall that the teacher should support all students’ participation in the classroom, and his comments made her recognise the importance of time management from the learners’ point of view. Then he asked one more question to make sure Emily understood the purpose of this activity in the final part of the lesson.

Coach: And of course what does it do for yourself if you have students and you ask them multiple questions?
Emily: It gives me less work.
Coach: It gives you less work?
Emily: And more variety in the examples that I can use as well.

Emily obviously did not answer the way the coach expected, but he did not reject her answer in the next excerpt. Instead, he tried to make her notice it herself, reminding her of teaching principles they shared in past experiences.

Coach: More variety, more pace, higher pace. But, what is the most important thing I always tell you, what do you need to know at the end of the lesson
or at the end of the daily activity?

Emily: If they really understood it.
Coach: That is it, right.
Emily: So with more examples from the class I know better if they know it.
Coach: Yes, exactly, because that is basically your constant objective, trying to find out if they get where I am going with this.

Emily reached the essential aspect, remembering that it is important to set the scene to assess whether the students achieved the lesson’s goal. At that point, she must have reconfirmed the importance of the students’ complete participation.

This coach asked several other questions in this conference:

- What would be the benefit of putting a plan on the board and using a PowerPoint presentation?
- What did you notice compared to previous lessons?
- Sometimes you wrote down most of the sentence, sometimes just the answer, why? Is there a reason for that?
- What does that tell you for next time?
- Do you like the way you used the questions, providing them with questions and then getting feedback from the class?
- Give me two things that you are really happy about in your lesson.
- Give me two things that you would do differently.

These questions also provided Emily with plenty of opportunities to reflect on her own teaching, and she noticed several aspects for improvement. For example, she had a chance to consider the proper use of PowerPoint slides and the whiteboard, depending on the purpose, or what to write on the whiteboard at what time. According to the coach, Emily has improved greatly in the way she interacts with the students, as seen in this lesson and in her reflection focusing on the students’ responses.

6. Discussion

Effective reflection is only possible when student teachers have a trusting relationship with their teacher educators. Teacher educators should listen to what student teachers say with empathy so that they can verbalise their own experience in a safe and supporting environment. In the two cases given in the previous sections, the coaches used a variety of questions and comments to help the student teachers look back on their actions, be aware of essential aspects, and create alternative methods of action, which are all important, along with the action and trial stages in the ALACT model cycle.

This procedure works well in the Netherlands because Dutch teacher training programs are designed so that student teachers spend about half of their studying hours in school. This harmonises with the concept of the realistic approach, which emphasises school-based experience for professional development. To guarantee a certain amount of experience and enough opportunities for continuous reflection, time is an important factor for successful training. If time was limited, it would be difficult for students to have stable development with ample experience and reflection.

In addition, teacher educators’ coaching skill is an important factor, enabling them
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to listen to student teachers and ask them appropriate questions and comments. Korthagen (2014) states that ‘in most institutions for teacher education in the Netherlands, mentor teachers from practicum schools are trained to coach student teachers with the aid of the ALACT model’ (p. 77). The coaches of the two cases in this paper followed some programs to develop their coaching skills, and they reported that the method of questioning they used is based on Korthagen’s reflection model. According to these coaches, some schools offer programs preparing teachers for this particular role with the organisation, and they can take a coaching course at the university. The association of Dutch teacher educators (VELON) provides a professional standard for teacher educators and supports their development throughout their own practice and reflection based on the standard.

However, the teacher training curriculum in the Netherlands is not without problems. One issue is the collaboration between institute-based and school-based teacher educators. According to the coaches and student teachers I interviewed, there are gaps of principle in teacher education between college or university and placement schools. One school-based teacher educator pointed out that the problem lies especially with the scientific approach to teaching emphasised at college or university, saying that they tend to forget how important it is in the beginning to focus on classroom management. Some student teachers complained that they had difficulty in linking assignments given at college or university and practice in school, meaning that school situations often do not match with what the assignments require. In contrast, institute-based teacher educators have difficulty when placement schools do not adopt the teaching strategies they teach their students. In that case, they often see that their students reject the Theories (with a capital T). This kind of mismatch is not new and is rather traditional, but it is still something to overcome to support student teachers’ professional development.

Perhaps the crucial point for discussion is what the roles of institute-based teacher educators are when we adopt the realistic approach or ALACT model, which emphasises learning from experience and reflection in school. Traditionally, institute-based teacher educators are expected to teach theories and school-based teacher educators provide practical knowledge, but such a distinction can be blurred when we focus on student teachers’ experience and reflection. In this case, the point of discussion is not theory or practice, but how to facilitate student teachers’ reflection based on their own experience.

What can institute-based teacher educators do? In many cases, they cannot visit the placement schools frequently, but can take measures to re-organise student teachers’ experiences. For example, they can ask student teachers to video-record some of their lessons and share their experience with peers in the seminar at university. The questions or comments given by institute-based teacher educators or peers may widen the scope of reflection. Of course, institute-based teacher educators should visit the placement schools as often as possible and attend after-class conferences with school-based teacher educators so both can share information useful to help student teachers’ further development. Such collaboration is also meaningful to identify the features of questions and comments from different specialisations. If the system of teacher training programs provides a limited amount of practice teaching in placement schools, institute-based teacher educators should give their students several opportunities to watch video-recorded lessons and conduct mock teaching followed by reflective discussion among students. Here institute-based teacher educators can ask questions and comments to facilitate their students’ reflection as preparation for practice teaching in placement schools.
7. Conclusion

Teacher education does not make products through an automated system. In consideration of the complex nature of teaching, student teachers need support from teacher educators to reflect effectively based on concrete experiences. In this context, the competences of teacher educators are very important. In the Netherlands, the specialised organisation VELON plays an important role in providing a platform where institute- and school-based teacher educators can register and work on their professional development based on the knowledge base for teacher educators. This kind of systematic support is necessary to expand this field and allow the involvement of competent teacher educators.

This paper used the ALACT model to describe teacher educators’ questions and student teachers’ reflection, but this does not mean that the model can handle all the issues in teacher education. To enable the teacher training curriculum to function as a whole, institute- and school-based teacher educators need to collaborate more to help student teachers accumulate knowledge and experience from which they can feel they are learning a lot. Moreover, teacher educators need to be responsible for quality assurance of teacher training course graduates depending on the changing situation in schools, so we may need to refine the qualification standard for teachers and develop appropriate measures for evaluation, which evokes the discussion about standardised tests. In fact, universities of applied sciences (hogescholen in Dutch) introduced a national knowledge test and the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) for English teachers’ qualifications.

The realistic approach, or any other, would function well when a variety of conditions are met. This means that the introduction of a new approach in a limited field may not in itself produce better teacher education. As is mentioned in section 4, the realistic approach in the Netherlands harmonises well with the national SBL competences, which consider reflection skills as a key competence for teachers. The SBL competences indicate that reflection skills show their real value with other domains, that is, interpersonal, pedagogical, didactical, and organisational competences (see Figure 2). In this sense, reflection skills must be integrated into teacher qualification as a whole. It is very important to share such a fundamental policy of teacher development between student teachers and teacher educators to ensure curriculum validity and facilitate motivation of student teachers.

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References


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