

Revisiting a self-study project: process, theory, artefacts, and multiple voices



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“Role of research in work of teacher educators”



Overview presentation

1. Research interest, context and focus: critical analysis facilitation process to support professional development through S-STEP
2. Rationale: taking a stance on facilitating professional development (4 propositions)
3. Findings: modified propositions as result of research on facilitation process
4. Discussion

1. Research interest and context

- Continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers/teacher educators is essential for good education
- Practitioner research is argued to create powerful opportunities for CPD (see e.g. Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999)
- Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) (Loughran et al., 2004; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015a)
subscribes to idea: teacher educators studying their own practice in order to
 - Improve practice based on new insights
 - Contribute to public and grounded knowledge base on teacher education
 - Develop professionally

Contextualising/Framing the problem

- Goal of scholarship and associated expectation of research rigor are often challenging and difficult to maintain if one's own practice and experiences are object of research
- (Most Flemish) teacher education happens in institutes without culture, tradition and expertise in research
- Consequence: new forms of collaboration between teacher educators and academic researchers develop (see e.g. Lunenberg et al., 2010; Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011)
- → S-STEP-project in Flanders

Facilitating S-STEP: a project in Flanders

- 2 year project:
 - 6 teacher educators from university colleges, using S-STEP approach in research on their pedagogical practices in relation to internships (student teachers' work place learning)
 - Shared conceptual framework on professional development
 - 2 academic researchers (+ university teacher educators) facilitating the process through
 - Input on relevant educational theories/research methodology
 - Facilitating exchange of experiences and peer learning (monthly meetings)

Multiple roles, multiple voices

- **Geert Kelchtermans & Eline Vanassche:**
 - academic researchers/teachers in teacher education
 - facilitators of S-STEPproject,
 - researching their own facilitation process (extensive report see: Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015b)
- **Elien Peeters:**
 - experienced teacher educator;
 - S-STEPproject on the use of reflective assignments to support student teachers' bridging the theory-practice gap during internships
- **Ann Deketelaere:**
 - Experienced teacher educator
 - Critical friend, writing support, editorial support

2. Rationale: a stance on professional development

- **Proposition 1:**

*'If we want **professional development** to result in **qualitative changes in both teacher educators' actions and thinking**, then we need to support them in making their **normative views on teacher education explicit**, as well as **critically evaluating** them (through discussion with peers and others).'*

Proposition 2

- *'If professional development results from the meaningful interaction between the individual teacher educator and his/her professional working context, then **teacher educators' individual experiences or questions need to be interpreted against the background of the structural and cultural working conditions in the teacher training institute.'***

Proposition 3

*'If professional development is organized through peer group meetings, then the **meetings should exemplify the concept of a professional learning community**, characterized by making explicit, publicly sharing, and critically interrogating one's teacher education practices in order to improve them.'*

Proposition 4

- *'If **teacher educators and academic researchers** collaborate in a research project aiming at professional development, then this collaboration should happen from a **perspective of complementary competence** in which the different expertise of both parties is mutually acknowledged and positively valued.'*

3. Findings: confirmation and amendments

- Evidence from project supported propositions from rationale (as basis for facilitation process)
- But also added nuances, modifications, amendments (refinements)

3.1. Amendments P1: Support critical analysis of normative views

1. Mirror data and input relevant theoretical framework facilitate public sharing and critical discussion of beliefs
2. Reflective analysis/study of own practice demands simultaneous engagement in two different agendas (doing teacher education/researching my teacher education) which may create tension.
3. These tensions need to be recognised and made explicit to avoid resistance and jeopardizing professional development

3.2. Amendments P2: Beliefs need to be interpreted in context (structure/culture)

1. Individual practices and beliefs are affected by and will affect practices and beliefs (culture). This interaction may be conflictuous → can facilitate or inhibit PD
2. These conflicts interfere in process of 'going public' on findings from S-STEP, although the latter is essential for PD

3.3. Amendments P3: professional learning community as guiding concept/ideal

1. Good peer relations in the project are essential condition for support in 'risky' endeavour of S-STEP and for PD
2. Paradoxically too positive peer relations may be counterproductive for PD as they may inhibit authentic critical discussion
3. Essential task for facilitators is to problematize the development of possible counterproductive collegial relationships and their normalizing impact

3.4. Amendment to P4: acknowledging and enacting complementary competence

1. In spite of efforts to work 'democratically' (acknowledging equal value of necessary complementary competence), group dynamics may result in relationships of hierarchy and dependence

4. Discussion:

- Paying attention to the double edged swords:
 - Relations and networks: support and conflict
 - The normative and political: essence, condition and obstacle
 - The private and the public
- Claim: “There is nothing as practical as theory” → the essential role of theory in
 - Problem framing/study design
 - Self-reflection
 - Interpretative analysis

5. More reading?

- Vanassche, E. & Kelchtermans, G. (2015b). Facilitating self-study of teacher education practices: toward a pedagogy of teacher educator professional development. *Professional Development in Education*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.986813>
- Kelchtermans, G., Vanassche, E. & Deketelaere, A. (Eds.)(2014). *Lessen uit LOEP: Lerarenopleiders Onderzoeken hun Eigen Praktijk*. Antwerpen-Apeldoorn: Garant.