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European Journal of Teacher Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713421837>

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Online Publication Date: 01 May 2008

To cite this Article Koster, B. and Dengerink, J. J. (2008) 'Professional standards for teacher educators: how to deal with complexity, ownership and function. Experiences from the Netherlands', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 31:2, 135 — 149

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/02619760802000115

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02619760802000115>

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Professional standards for teacher educators: how to deal with complexity, ownership and function. Experiences from the Netherlands

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During the last decade several professional standards describing competencies for teaching staff in secondary and higher education have been developed. Not all these standards are considered fruitful by the relevant professional communities of teachers and teacher educators. In this article we analyse the experiences with the Dutch standard for teacher educators and an accompanying procedure for self-assessment, professional development and registration (SPR). Our questions are: what are the issues about professional complexity and ownership which arise? How is the standard used by the Dutch teacher educators? Does the standard stimulate professional development or is it a quality assurance device for teacher educators? To answer these questions we analysed interviews, questionnaires and portfolios from teacher educators who participated in the procedure for SPR. We found that in the Dutch standard for teacher educators, complexity is brought into the SPR processes by, for example, teacher educators sharing the content in a professional dialogue with peer assessors or by asking teacher educators to write about authentic situations in which different competencies are integrated and related to one another. The development of the Dutch standard by the teacher educators themselves contributed to powerful feelings of ownership. We conclude that the Dutch standard, plus the accompanying procedure for SPR, is not only helpful for individual professional accountability, but is used and esteemed as well as a strong instrument for individual professional development.

Ces dix dernières années, plusieurs normes professionnelles décrivant les compétences nécessaires au corps enseignant de l'éducation secondaire et supérieure ont été développées. Ces normes ne sont pas toutes considérées comme fructueuses par les groupes professionnels d'enseignants et de formateurs d'enseignants. Dans cet article, nous analysons les expériences acquises avec la norme néerlandaise pour les formateurs d'enseignants, ainsi qu'une procédure d'accompagnement pour l'autoévaluation, le développement professionnel et l'enregistrement (SPR): comment la complexité de la profession et la participation sont-elles gérées, et comment la norme est-elle utilisée par les formateurs d'enseignants néerlandais? La norme stimule-t-elle le développement professionnel ou l'assurance du niveau de qualité de formateurs d'enseignants, ou les deux? Afin de répondre à ces questions, nous avons analysé des interviews, des questionnaires et des portefeuilles de formateurs d'enseignants qui ont participé à la procédure de SPR. Nous avons découvert que dans la norme néerlandaise appliquée aux formateurs d'enseignants, la complexité est apportée par exemple en partageant le contenu dans un dialogue professionnel avec des évaluateurs pairs et en demandant aux formateurs d'enseignants de décrire par écrit des situations authentiques dans lesquelles différentes compétences sont intégrées et reliées entre elles. Le développement de la norme néerlandaise par les formateurs d'enseignants eux-mêmes a contribué à la participation. Non seulement la norme

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néerlandaise et la procédure d'accompagnement de SPR sont-elles utiles pour la responsabilisation de chaque professionnel, mais elles sont également utilisées et estimées comme un outil puissant de développement professionnel personnel.

Im zurückliegenden Jahrzehnt wurden mehrere Berufsnormen entwickelt, in denen die Kompetenzen für Lehrkräfte im zweiten Bildungsgang und in der Hochschulausbildung beschrieben werden. Nicht jede der festgelegten Normen gilt in den Berufsgruppen der Lehrer und Dozierenden für die Lehrerausbildung als fruchtbar. In diesem Artikel werden die Erfahrungen analysiert, die mit der niederländischen Norm für Lehrerausbildungsdozierende sowie mit einem dazugehörigen Verfahren für die Selbstbewertung, berufliche Entwicklung und Registrierung (SPR, Self-assessment, Professional development and Registration) gesammelt wurden: Wie geht man mit der Komplexität und der Frage des Eigentums um, und wie wird die Norm von den niederländischen Dozierenden für die Lehrerausbildung genutzt? Wird durch die Norm die berufliche Entwicklung von Lehrerausbildungsdozierenden gefördert oder deren Qualität besser gesichert, oder vielleicht beides? Um diese Fragen zu beantworten, haben wir Befragungsgespräche, Fragebögen und Portfolios von Lehrerausbildungsdozierenden die sich an dem SPR-Verfahren beteiligt hatten, ausgewertet. Wir haben festgestellt, daß in der niederländischen Norm für Lehrerausbildungsdozierende Komplexität unter anderem dadurch hervorgerufen wird, daß der Inhalt eines Fachgesprächs im Rahmen der Begutachtung durch Berufskollegen mitgeteilt wird, und daß von Lehrerausbildungsdozierenden die Formulierung einer authentischen Situation verlangt wird, in der verschiedene Kompetenzen integriert und zueinander in Bezug gesetzt werden. Die Entwicklung der niederländischen Norm die Lehrerausbildungsdozierenden selbst hat zu einem starken Eigentumsgefühl beigetragen. Die niederländische Norm, sowie das dazugehörige SPR-Verfahren, ist nicht nur nützlich, wo es um die berufliche Rechenschaftslegung des Einzelnen geht, sondern wird außerdem als wichtiges Mittel für die individuelle berufliche Entwicklung eingesetzt und geschätzt.

En las últimas décadas se han desarrollado diversas Normas Profesionales que describen las competencias del personal docente en la educación secundaria y superior. Sin embargo, las comunidades profesionales de profesores y formadores de profesores no consideran provechosas todas estas normas. En el presente artículo analizamos las experiencias con la Norma holandesa para formadores de profesores, junto con un procedimiento de autoevaluación, desarrollo y registro profesional (SPR): ¿cómo se aborda la complejidad de la profesión y la apropiación, y cómo utilizan la norma los formadores de profesores holandeses? ¿Estimula la norma el desarrollo profesional o el aseguramiento de la calidad de los formadores de profesores, o quizás ambos? Con objeto de responder a estas preguntas procedimos a analizar entrevistas, cuestionarios y expedientes de formadores de profesores que participaron en el procedimiento de SPR. Descubrimos que en la Norma holandesa para formadores de profesores la complejidad se introduce por ejemplo compartiendo el contenido en un diálogo profesional con Evaluadores Pares y pidiendo a los formadores de profesores que describan situaciones auténticas en las que diferentes competencias se integran y relacionan entre sí. El desarrollo de la Norma holandesa por parte de los propios formadores de profesores contribuyó a la apropiación. La Norma holandesa, junto con el procedimiento de SPR, no sólo promueve la responsabilidad profesional individual, sino que también se utiliza y valora como un sólido instrumento para el desarrollo profesional individual.

Introduction

During the last decade there has been an increase in the number of professional standards describing competencies for teachers in secondary and higher

education. In the 1990s several professional standards were developed for teachers in, for example, the US (NBPTS 2001), the UK (TDA, <http://www.tda.gov.uk/teachers/professionalstandards.aspx>) and Australia (<http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/standards/standards.html>) and for teacher educators in the US (Association of Teacher Educators 1996). In the UK a Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education was developed in 2006 (Higher Education Academy 2006). In the Netherlands a standard for teacher educators was developed around the turn of the millennium (Koster and Dengerink 2001; Houston et al. 2002).

Not all of these standards are considered helpful by the professional communities of teachers and teacher educators. The sheer numbers of objections indicate that the value of standards or competencies approaches for professional accountability and quality assurance may be over-emphasized. A number of authors state, for example, that lists of competencies do not take into account the complexity and the unpredictability of teaching and learning (see, for example, Eraut 1994; Korthagen 2004; Zeichner 2005). Another criticism is that professional standards, as normative structures, may lead to de-professionalisation (Cochran-Smith 2001; Valli and Rennert-Ariev 2002), because they leave little incentive for professionals to reflect upon their own norms and values. Other authors argue that when standards are imposed, professionals tend to rely on these external norms (Sachs 2003) and are not stimulated to use standards for their own professional development (Zuzovsky and Libman 2003).

Since 2005 the standards debate has been one of the issues addressed in ATEE (ATEE, 2005, 2006). In this organisation discussion has focused mainly on the need for conceptual clarity and on the perspectives on and indicators for teacher and teacher educator quality. In this article we analyse experiences of developing and implementing the Dutch standard for teacher educators. Our central questions are: what are the issues about professional complexity and ownership which arise in the use of such a standard? Is the standard imposed on the Dutch teacher educators or are they the owners of the standard? And how is the standard used by teacher educators?

We begin this article by briefly describing the way in which the Dutch standard for teacher educators has been developed. This standard is used in the so-called procedure for self-assessment, professional development and registration (SPR). Since the standard is largely articulated through the SPR, we also describe the development of this procedure and make explicit the role which the standard plays in it. In part 2 of the article we focus on how the professional standards take into account the complexity of the profession of teacher educator. In part 3 we link professional standards with assessment and the question of how to deal with the ownership of standards. In part 4 we discuss whether it is the function of the standard to stimulate professional development or to assure the quality of teacher educators' work, or whether it has both functions. In the last part of the paper we summarize our findings and draw some conclusions.

Development of the Dutch standard for teacher educators and the procedure for self-assessment, professional development and registration

In 1999 the Association of Dutch teacher educators (VELON) developed, with financial support from the government, the first version of a standard for teacher

educators. This was done because the teacher educators working within VELON wanted to have an instrument that could be used to make the quality of the Dutch teacher education profession transparent. They also wanted to have an instrument that could be used to improve that quality by teacher educators themselves (and for their own professional development). The second version of the standard was developed in 2003.

This second version of the Dutch standard consists of six different fields of competence. For every field we give an example of an aspect that is part of that field of competence, for example:

1. interpersonal: creates a safe (working) atmosphere;
2. pedagogical: creates for student teachers an inspiring and stimulating learning environment;
3. organisational: improvises if necessary;
4. working with colleagues in the organisation: actively contributes towards the development and implementation of the organisation's outlook and policy;
5. working in a wider context: has a relevant network and keeps it up-to-date;
6. working on your own development: reflects systematically on their own pedagogical approach and (teaching) behaviour towards students, colleagues and others.

The development process of the original standard 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 (Association of Teacher Educators 1996). The plenary and working group discussions resulted in some general ideas about the content of a standard for Dutch teacher educators. In 1998 a development group of 20 teacher educators (from different types of teacher education institutions and backgrounds) wrote the content of the standard. This first draft was then discussed during another working conference in January 1999, and the first public version was published in the middle of 1999. This was 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. The same procedures were followed in 2003 to develop the second version of the standard.

To serve the goals of quality assurance and professional development the standard itself was not enough. An extra instrument was needed, and for that reason, in 2000, as part of the Dutch project 'Professional Quality of Teacher Educators', the procedure of (self-) assessment, professional development and registration (SPR) was developed. After successfully completing this procedure, participants are registered by the Association of Dutch Teacher Educators as certified teacher educators. The professional standard combined with this procedure is what Ingvarson (1998) calls 'a standards-based professional development system'. Within this procedure the standard is used as a reference point by teacher educators. Participants in SPR are asked:

1. to analyse their strengths and weaknesses by using a structured standard-based score form and describe authentic situations, which demonstrate good practice examples from their own work;

2. to discuss these products with a peer coach, who is also a participant in the procedure;
3. to assemble feedback from colleagues and student teachers by giving them a structured standard-based score form to be filled in by at least 30 students and five colleagues;
4. to formulate goals and develop a plan for professional development;
5. to discuss their products and professional development plan with two peer assessors;
6. to construct a portfolio containing a description of how they worked on their professional development and about the outcomes of their professional development;
7. to have a final assessment in a meeting with the peer assessors.

Participation in the procedure is on a purely voluntary basis. Frequently, the participants' employing institution will cover the required fee and will partly compensate individuals for their time. The time required for the procedure is 40 hours for the first four steps, and another 40 hours for the sixth step, which consists of the professional development activities and construction of the portfolio. Every participant is allocated two peer assessors. The assessors are selected by the Dutch Association of Teacher Educators. Peer assessors are paid and trained for their work. They evaluate the products and portfolios of the participants, and judge whether a participant will be allowed to receive registration.

Professional standards as a list of competencies or showing complexity?

A standard usually refers to what teachers or educators are expected to know and be able to do (Ingvarson 1998). This implies common and agreed focuses, and denotes a degree of quality that is proper or adequate for specific purposes (Richardson 1994). Most standards for teachers or teacher educators cover a number of 'competence' areas, such as content knowledge, pedagogical skills, reflective skills and so on. In line with Poole, Horrigan, Langran-Fox and Nielsen (1998) and Spencer and Spencer (1993), we define a competency as a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and personal characteristics which allow an individual to act effectively in a particular situation. To be competent means to be able to act appropriately (effectively) and professionally in a certain context. Somebody who is competent uses knowledge, skills, attitudes, personal characteristics and values with alertness to the specific situation and in an integrated way.

The Dutch standard for teacher educators consists of different elements of competence. In the quotation shown below, five examples of the standard are cited in relation to the element of competence for which they 'stand':

- Works together with others in multi-disciplinary teams (knowledge)
- Models excellent teaching / practises what he/she preaches (skill)
- Is focused on the development of participants (attitude)
- Is open to others (value)
- Is dedicated, committed and involved (personal characteristic)

In terms of content alone, the Dutch standard does not differ greatly from the content of other standards for teachers and teacher educators, but we see this

standard as an instrument that can reflect the complexity and integrated nature of the teacher education profession, as we will illustrate later in this paper.

Standards can be used by teacher educators as a list that describes what they have to do and how they have to do it. Understood in this limited way, standards tell the teacher educators in detail how to behave and the only thing they have to do is 'tick off' a long list of behavioural elements ('standards as a description of behaviour'). Standards can also be used to look carefully at an individual's professional behaviour, to analyse what has happened and why, and to work out alternatives to improving individual functioning as a professional teacher educator ('standards as a frame of reference and for self-regulation'). To prevent Dutch teacher educators from using the standard as a 'tick list', the current specifications are shorter (only two pages long in total) and have been set up in a global way. This means that teacher educators using the standard have to make every element more specific and to make it 'concrete' by reference to their own experiences and the context in which they are working.

Since the standard is developed for the more experienced teacher educator, who has an average of five years of experience, the competencies are quite complex. This can be seen, for example, in standards such as, 'models excellent teaching / practises what he/she preaches' or 'creates for student teachers an inspiring and stimulating learning environment'.

The participants are questioned by the peer assessors to reflect upon what they think is the core of the teacher education profession. They are asked to explain the theoretical or ethical principles underpinning their professional behaviour and to formulate their future ambitions as an experienced teacher educator. This means that the standard is not a tick list, but an instrument for professional dialogue that encompasses the complexity of professional work.

Furthermore, teacher educators are stimulated to show that they use these competencies in an integrated and effective way by analysing and writing about 'authentic situations', as part of the procedure for SPR. In the procedure an 'authentic situation' is described as 'good practice examples of concrete and specific teacher educator behaviour according to competencies within a certain context'.

Every participant develops at least two authentic situations in which different competencies are demonstrated. These situations become part of the participants' portfolio. Authentic situations are in general between three and five pages long. They start with a description of the context.

An authentic situation of a participant in SPR is now described briefly to give an idea of how competencies are described in an integrated and effective way. In this situation the participant describes and analyses the changes in a teacher education programme with music as its subject in a primary teacher education college.

First the participant describes her role in the situation: what happens, what she actually did and what the result was. To summarize the first three pages of the authentic situation: the teacher educator wants to give the student teachers more responsibility for their own development. Consequently, she starts by clearly formulating the areas of professional knowledge which the student teachers have to work on. The student teachers are also given considerable freedom to choose their own learning activities, and the teacher educator gives extensive feedback during the process. The educator also has to learn to let her students 'loose'. The educator encourages the student teachers to ask many questions and to take the initiative in

steering their development. The desired effect of the change is that the student teachers will become more involved in their own learning processes and will be better prepared for what they want to achieve in their own classes with their pupils.

After this description, the participant relates her own role and behaviour to elements of the standard and analyses which competencies are shown in this description. The participant states that she 'dares to take risks and initiatives' by developing a new programme for the music curriculum. She makes clear that she 'is in control, gives space to student teachers and confronts them in a balanced way', which is an important competency in the interpersonal area. Looking at her pedagogy as a teacher educator she states that she 'makes her pedagogical approach transparent for the student teachers' by discussing constantly and sharing with them the choices she makes and the reasons not to choose alternative strategies. Because she shares her new plans and the developments with colleagues she 'makes her educational views and concepts explicit to them'.

Since the teacher education profession is becoming more complex and views about it are changing, the standard in the Netherlands will be brought up to date every four years. In the last version, which originates from 2003, the knowledge creation role of the experienced teacher educator is made explicit. This element was not part of the 1999 version of the standard, but it is now formulated as delivering 'a contribution towards the knowledge production about teacher education and teaching'. A further example of changing requirements is the statement which asks teacher educators to stimulate 'students to reflect on their experiences and to assess themselves on their own capabilities for the teaching profession'.

Professional standards and assessment: how to deal with ownership

In the last five years systems using a standards-based model have been developed and implemented in the UK. Such 'systems' include the Chartered Teacher Programme in Scotland (Christie 2006), and a Professional Recognition Scheme, based on the Professional Standard Framework for Higher Education Teachers, to enable academics to become Associate or (Senior) Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (Higher Education Academy 2006). Similar initiatives have occurred in Australia (see, for example, <http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/standards/standards.html>). Such 'systems' seem to accord well with national or state policies to enhance the quality of education, by placing increasing pressure on individual performance. Although most of the related assessment systems to these standards may have the intention to be formative and to facilitate professional development, professionals themselves more often experience these systems as external instruments for ensuring professional accountability. This is one of the reasons why professionals themselves tend to be sceptical about these professional development systems (Sachs 2003).

Like the standards for teacher educators developed by the Association of Teacher Educators in the USA, the Dutch standard for teacher educators was developed by teacher educators within their professional association. In this model then, standard development takes place by the professional group itself and its content is constructed by educators themselves, ideally generating feelings of ownership. Ownership in this sense means that teacher educators have a voice in both the processes of developing the standard and in the final product and its use.

But even when a professional standard is developed by the professional group itself, alertness on the issue of what ‘ownership’ means, and how it is generated, still remains necessary. For example, a core group of teacher educators could very easily set up a new standard which might be ‘state of the art’ and ‘up to date’, but which does not accord with the views of the majority. This means that a careful composing of development committees, structures for commitment and a regular evaluation of the use of the standard are essential.

In 2005, as part of our research on how SPR was developing in practice, in-depth interviews took place with three participants selected at random from the Dutch Register of teacher educators. One of these teacher educators described what ownership meant to him:

Well, I did know about the standard. I did know about the list of qualities you should have but I never made them my own. But in this process I have learned to work with it, to work at it myself. The elements were not new but the feedback you get from your colleagues and from your students especially, that was quite something.

Question: what kind of something was it?

Well, I thought I could reflect on myself reasonably well but my students especially taught me that I had to improve things. For instance, the frequency of involving the students, I had to work on that, that is what they told me.

For this interviewee then participating in the development of the standard itself, using the standard, as well as participating in the (self-) assessment procedure enhanced ownership and self-identification with the standards’ approach.

Function of the standard: professional development and accountability

Our third question was about how the standard is used by Dutch teacher educators. Initially, the standard-based system, which was developed in the Netherlands (see above, for the procedure of SPR), served two functions:

1. It was considered important that teacher educators made transparent to the outside world what the level of quality of their professional practice was (accountability).
2. It was important that the standard was used to stimulate participants to work on their own professional development as teacher educators (development).

The question is whether these functions have become reality and how they work out in practice. On an individual level teacher educators can make transparent the quality of their professional practice. But quality can also be defined on a communal and intra-professional level; the professional group can make transparent the level of professional quality of its members. A professional group can even decide to give guarantees of the quality of its members on the basis of accreditation of courses for beginning and experienced professionals, including assessment, certification and disciplinary jurisdiction.

Professional development can also be defined in various ways: firstly, it can be understood as the process by which a professional group as a whole seeks to acquire more of the characteristics defined as paradigmatic concerning that profession; secondly, it can be seen as the improvement in the quality of services provided by an individual professional. We will now discuss these two meanings.

The development of maturity and strong senses of professionalism in an occupational group implies that that group sets high standards of quality, a professional association exists, and professionals are properly educated. An important characteristic of an established profession is that systematic activities towards professional development take place so that members of the professional group and the group as a whole take responsibility for their professional development¹ (Eraut 1994; Day 1999). Professional development can also mean that an individual teacher educator improves the quality of his or her work and tries to 'become the best professional one can possibly be'. (Smith 2003: 203). Professional development conceived in this way includes the largely private, unaided learning from experience through which most teachers learn to survive, become competent and develop in classrooms and schools; as well as informal development opportunities in schools and the more formal 'accelerated' learning opportunities available through internally and externally generated in-service education and training activities (Day 1999: 2–3).

Schematically, the four basic functions of a standards-based professional development system may be represented as follows:

Accountability of the profession	Professional development of the profession
Individual accountability	Individual professional development

An important aspect of the procedure of SPR is that it is based on the concept of self-regulation. Self-assessment was taken as a starting point in the procedure of SPR. Participants analysed their own situation, shared this with a peer coach (also a participant) and organised 360° feedbacks. In every step they used the standard for analysing their situation or for initiating a professional dialogue. Subsequently, participants built a portfolio. The value of the portfolio for professional development is particularly associated with the quality of self-evaluation and self-assessment (Smith and Tillema 2001; Ross and Bruce 2007; Tillema and Smith 2007).

The peer assessors in the Dutch procedure of SPR, who are selected by the Dutch Association of Teacher Educators, have a double role. On the one hand, they play an assessment role by looking at the first file the participants hand in, asking themselves 'does this file contain sufficient evidence to show that this participant is an experienced teacher educator?' On the other hand, they play a supportive role in stimulating the participants to formulate challenging professional development goals and plans for themselves. What did the teacher educators, who used the standard by participating in the procedure of SPR, say about the function of the standard for them? The three registered teacher educators, interviewed in 2005, said:

1. I was forced to look at my teaching, to look at myself, to really take a close look at what kind of person I am. And you are forced a few times during the project to work on your weak points. I think that is very good.

We ask our students to reflect on their own learning process; we have to do this as teacher educators as well. That was primarily the value for me.

Question: could you have done it without a standard?

No, I don't think so. When you ask a colleague, okay, you can come to a lesson. You can ask a colleague to come and ask him or her what kind of teacher you are, then it is a process on the surface. Now you have to dive deep into yourself. And I think that is great.

2. I've been forced to think about all kind of aspects of my teacher education profession. That has been very good for me and what I also consider very valuable is that others have thought about it and that I could compare my view with their view about me.

Question: Can you say in one sentence what has been so valuable about that?

Well, you are not used to reflect in that way on your own functioning and it is very good to take a step back and look at all those aspects and to compare one's own ideas with other people's ideas, and I have noticed that you learn a lot from that.

3. Then it becomes much more focused and I liked that. It has a surplus value that the things you sometimes leave to do or things that don't get a lot of attention get a bit more attention during the task. I found that important. And it makes you think, I was confronted with 'working as a teacher educator in a wider context', so I asked myself: how could I fill that in?

So what these teacher educators said was, in essence, using the standard made us think, reflect, dive deep, look at our weak points, get feedback from others and develop a new focus. What this means is that for these educators using a standard, which is embedded in a system of self-assessment and dialogue with colleagues, stimulates reflection and professional development.

In 2006 we asked registered teacher educators to fill in an evaluation form to find out how meaningful they found the different steps of the SPR procedure. Fifteen forms were received from the participants who successfully finished their participation in the procedure. This is about 55 percent of all the registered teacher educators that year.

On the basis of these evaluation results we may conclude that within a self-assessment procedure, participants find a step made individually (1) less meaningful than a step with feedback from either a professional dialogue with students, colleagues or peers (2, 3, 5 and 7). They consider the step, which most resembles the use of the standard as a tick-list (1), the least meaningful. The first and seventh steps of the procedure are strictly focused on assessment, while the other steps have a focus on professional development as well. Participants tend to find steps which are directed towards professional development (2, 3 and 5) more meaningful than steps which are directed towards assessment (1 and 7).

In a study on the professional development of the participants in the procedure of SPR (Koster, Dengerink, Korthagen and Lunenberg, in press) 25 completed

Table 1. How meaningful participants, registered as certified teacher educators in 2006, find the different steps in the first part of the procedure for SPR (N=15).

Steps of the procedure	<i>Less meaningful than expected</i>	<i>As meaningful as expected</i>	<i>More meaningful than expected</i>
<i>Analysis of strengths and weaknesses (1)</i>	1	12	2
<i>Concretising and underpinning with peer coach (2)*</i>	2	4	8
<i>Feedback colleagues and participants/ student teachers (3)</i>	1	6	8
<i>Discussion with peer assessors (5)*</i>	0	6	8
<i>Final assessment with peer assessors (7)</i>	0	9	5

* N=14, because one participant left these steps blank in the evaluation.

portfolios were analysed on the goals the participants formulated for their professional development, the kind of professional development activities in which they engaged, and the outcomes of their professional development. This study showed the following for teacher educators, who voluntarily participated in the standard-based procedure for SPR: they were, firstly, able to set goals for their professional development; secondly, they were challenged to use a broad variety of professional development activities; and, thirdly, they experienced that they – and in many cases their professional environment as well – benefited professionally from participating in this procedure.

We found that nearly all the participants reported positive outcomes at the level of cognition. A majority of the participants also reported changes in their own behaviour. Although the project and the procedure were directed towards individual professional development, more than one-third of the participants reported outcomes at a collective level, by sharing outcomes either with colleagues of their institute or with members of the professional community of teacher educators as a whole. More than one-third of the participants reported outcomes unrelated to the goals they set at the start of their participation. Such outcomes seemed to focus on the values and self-esteem of participants. For example, participants reported ‘a more positive self-esteem’, a contribution towards ‘my personality and values’ or ‘my (*increased*) enthusiasm for teacher education’.

The Dutch standard for teacher educators has both accountability and professional development functions. In terms of accountability we found that it is important that the use of the standard is embedded in a system of self-assessment and dialogue with colleagues. If this is done, then the standard can stimulate reflection and professional development. Within the system of self-assessment participants find steps with feedback from others or in a professional dialogue with others (students, colleagues or peers) more meaningful. By looking more closely at the function of professional development, we found that participants not only reported outcomes on an individual level, but also at the level of the profession.

Conclusions

In this article, we have asked ourselves three questions: what are the issues about professional complexity and ownership in the use of the standards? Is the standard imposed on the Dutch teacher educators or are they owners of the standard? And how is the standard used by the teacher educators?

We found that in the implementation of the Dutch standard for teacher educators complexity is introduced by asking the teacher educators to relate the different elements of the standard and to make it specific for their own situation. This is done, firstly, by the development of the standard in relation to the work of experienced teacher educators; secondly, by sharing the content of the standard in a professional dialogue with peer assessors; and, thirdly, by asking teacher educators to write about authentic situations in which different competencies are integrated and related to one another.

The Dutch standard is not imposed on teacher educators, but has been developed and reviewed intra-professionally. Teacher educators own the standard, not least because it is combined with a formative self-assessment procedure. We assert that the Dutch standard is, in combination with the designated procedure of SPR, not only

helpful for individual accountability, but that it is well used and esteemed as a strong instrument for individual professional development.

In recent discussions with teacher educators from other national contexts, we have found that standards had the connotation of imposing or prescribing the behaviour of teacher educators. As we saw in the introduction, in other countries other concepts such as a 'professional framework', are used. This term might, because of its openness, stimulate teacher educators to look at the complexity of their work and might be considered, by some, as a better concept than standards.

As specified earlier in this article, we have given ourselves the task to renew our standard every four years. In other words: the content of the current standard is not relevant for ever, but only for a limited time. New developments in teacher education in the Netherlands are shifting the field from a theoretical orientation to a more school-based approach, focusing on practical experience as the starting point for teacher education, and moving towards a more constructivist approach (Korthagen 2000; Korthagen and Lunenberg 2004). At the same time we see developments advocating more evidence-based and research-based teacher education and teacher educators' striving for 'scholarship in teaching and learning', as being in line with ongoing discussions about teaching and learning in secondary and higher education (Shulman 2000; Hutchings 2002; Cochran-Smith 2003). These national changes in how teacher education is understood may well result in future changes to any new standard for Dutch teacher educators.

In a recent discussion about the quality of teacher educators (see, for example, Murray 2005) different contributors emphasise that we have to search for the essence of the teacher educators' professional quality. We see different publications in which the 'identity' of the teacher educator is further explored (Korthagen 2005; Murray, Shagrir and Swennen, in press; Murray, in preparation). Additionally, in the US, but not yet in the Netherlands, there is an intensification of discussions about the civic responsibility of academics and teacher educators (Cochran-Smith 2006). The third version of the Dutch standard, which will be developed in 2008, might have to give experienced teacher educators a frame of reference also for their identity, inspiration, sources, motives, civic responsibility and for a more research-based practice. This openness and broadness might make the standard more in line with the growing complexity of the teacher educator profession.

Currently, we see the combination of the Dutch standard and the procedure of SPR is a strong vehicle for individual professional development. At the same time we know that the membership, participation in discussions and conferences and the quality of the discussions within the Dutch Association of Teacher Educators has vastly increased in the last years. The introduction of the professional standard and procedure of SPR, in addition to other factors, has contributed to that increase. If teacher educators use the standard to make their views transparent and the quality of their professional practice evident to all stakeholders, they can share this understanding with peers from inside and outside their own institute, and thus contribute towards the increase of knowledge about what a competent teacher educator can do. Consequently, 'the collaborative inquiry of teacher educators about assumptions and values, professional knowledge and practice, the contexts of schools as well as higher education and their own as well as their students learning' (Cochran-Smith 2003:7) will deepen.

In the Netherlands plans are suggested to create communities for certified teacher educators, so that these teacher educators will become committed participants in collaborative inquiry. This will, we hope, lead teacher educators to feel more motivated to be part of a professional learning community, to have increased self-esteem and to feel enhanced pride in their occupation. It will also, we hope, initiate a dynamic process in which the professional group itself will work on the development of professional quality. This in turn would contribute to the growth of the teacher educator profession.

Note

1. Other characteristics of an established profession are (Verloop 2001): the profession performs a crucial social function; entrance to the profession requires a lengthy period of higher education; the profession centres on the pre-eminence of clients' interests; professionals have a certain amount of freedom to make their own judgments with regard to what is considered as appropriate practice; and the profession is rewarded by high prestige and a high level of remuneration.

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