



Past perceptions and future expectations: Sensed dis/continuity at the start of teacher education



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Self-concepts of student teachers include a large variety of characteristics.
- Their sense of (dis)continuity shows variance in professional identification.
- The framework of (dis)continuity can be beneficial for adaptive supervision.

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ABSTRACT

Because of pressing issues such as teacher attrition, we explored differences in student teachers' expectations and perceptions as they entered teacher education. Thirty-five narrated self-concepts of student teachers in a post-graduate teacher education program were studied. From these we identified four types of past perceptions and four types of future expectations.

Combinations of perceptions and expectations were found to be illustrative of three types of sensed dis/continuity in student teachers. The findings assemble into a framework that can be beneficial for researchers and teacher educators in diagnosing dis/continuities in the self-concept and consequent expectations about further development as a teacher.

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1. Introduction

Learning to become a teacher is often reported as a challenging and strenuous process (e.g. Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), amongst other things because it includes dealing with tensions or “competing demands within their teaching” (Freeman, 1993, p. 488). If student teachers fail to deal with such tensions, for instance when they have to be strict although they feel this does not match their personality, it has been found that they are more likely to leave teacher education or not enter the teaching profession (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Pillen, Beijaard, & den Brok, 2013). As qualitative and quantitative teacher shortages are a major problem in many countries around the world (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011;

UNESCO, 2013; Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015), expanding the knowledge of how to support student teachers for entering and persisting in teaching is needed.

Research in this area so far has focused predominantly on typical tensions and coping strategies, common consequences for teachers and general suggestions for support in teacher education. Tensions have, for instance, been conceptualized as concerns (Fuller, 1969), dilemmas (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013), and professional identity tensions (Pillen et al., 2013). Others have found that tensions in teacher development pertain to both personal and professional aspects (cf. Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). From research on resilience in teachers, many researchers have concluded that teacher education should support student teachers in developing effective coping strategies needed to deal with challenges (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Johnson et al., 2014). Conway, and others, suggested that teacher education practice should include attention to anticipation, reflection, and learning opportunities that can arise from experiencing some form of crisis (Conway, 2001; Hammerness

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et al., 2005; Kelchtermans, 2009; Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, & Wubbels, 2001; Meijer, 2011).

The extent to which labels such as “challenging” and “strenuous” apply to all student teachers alike is yet unclear. Pillen et al. (2013) suggested that not all student teachers come across, and suffer from, challenging experiences equally. In this study we will investigate how student teachers identify with the profession when they enter teacher education, including their perceptions of prior experiences and expectations of themselves as teachers. We will study student teachers who enter a one-year, post-graduate teacher education program, in which they start teaching in a school immediately after an introduction week at the university for about 50% of the available time in the program. Accordingly, student teachers experience what it means to be a teacher in practice already at the beginning of teacher education program and are potentially confronted with tensions right away. Our focus is on the start of the teacher education program, as research on transitions in education and career has shown that the transition into a professional role evokes heightened reflexivity in individuals, which is aimed at solving conflicting ideas about oneself in light of the transitional goal (Ecclestone, Biesta, & Hughes, 2009; Webb & Warren, 2009). In line with research on career development we acknowledge that each student teacher enters teacher education with at least some ideas about him/herself as a teacher, as one starts to identify with a profession the moment one starts to think about this career option (Konstam, 2014; Savickas, 1997; Super, 1980).

2. Theoretical framework

In the following sections, we turn to adjacent domains such as psychology, neuropsychology and sociology in order to clarify why and how the construction of a self-concept as a teacher is considered essential for teacher development. We also elaborate on the narrative nature of sense making and address the concepts of continuity and discontinuity.

2.1. The self-concept

The unique way of being and acting of each individual is believed to be strongly influenced by his or her sense of self (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Leary & Tangney, 2003). Researchers from domains varying from psychology and career development to neuroscience recognize the notion of self as an important topic. Klein and Gangi (2010) stated, “Each of us has the experience of a unitary self, an ‘I’ that remembers, chooses, thinks, plans and feels” (p. 1). Mead (1934) introduced the notion of self as a mechanism that directs every individual’s actions. Rodgers and Scott (2008), in the *Handbook of research on teacher education*, considered the self to subsume teacher identity. In line with this, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) stressed that identity, although related to the personal dimension of the self, is also often viewed from the perspective of the profession.

The individuals’ concept of his- or herself has been identified as one of the most significant regulators of behavior (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Psychologists commonly define this *self-concept* as a sense of who one is, including personality characteristics (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Slotter & Gardner, 2014). Characteristics, or distinguishing qualities, can pertain to dispositional traits (“I am enthusiastic and creative”) and to perceptions about oneself stemming from interactions and relationships with others (“I am a colleague one can depend on”).

In the domain of career research, the Self-Concept Theory developed by Donald Super has been central in considering career development as a process of successively refining and applying one’s self-concept to the domain of work (Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, &

Jordaan, 1963). Super introduced the *vocational self-concept* and defined it as “[t]he constellation of self-attributes considered by the individual to be vocationally relevant” (Super et al., 1963, p. 20).

A person considers what is relevant to the self-concept by means of *sensemaking*. Hermans (2002) referred to sensemaking as an inner dialogue in which people negotiate what is characteristic for themselves. Ezzy (1998) conceptualized it as an ongoing internal and reflective narrative. In research on teacher development, several authors have argued that teachers make sense of who they are as teachers through actively and iteratively giving meaning to experiences that provide information about the self (Kelchtermans, 2005; Korthagen, 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). The process of sensemaking as a teacher starts the moment a person considers a career as a teacher (Konstam, 2014; Savickas, 1997; Super, 1980). Each student teacher thus enters teacher education with at least a tentative self-concept as a teacher.

2.2. Perceptions of the past and expectations of the future

An exploration into the nature of sensemaking should include development in and over time because perceptions of the past and expectations of the future determine the course of sensemaking (Bruner, 1990; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1996; Zittoun et al., 2013). Neurological research supports this, showing how memory and imagination are essential for decision making, behavior and one’s sense of self (Buckner & Carroll, 2007; Schacter et al., 2012).

By selecting appropriated past events people make sense of themselves in the present (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; McAdams, 1993; McLean & Pasupathi, 2011). In other words, people consider what is relevant to the self-concept in a narrative process of continuous revision, relying on perceptions of past experiences and on past self-concepts (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007).

Likewise, the forecast about what may happen in the future, realistically or hopefully, will influence an individual’s sensemaking process (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1996). Making sense of oneself is always connected to what can eventually happen (Poli, 2010) or what is considered a possibility (d’Argembeau, Lardi, & Van der Linden, 2012). In the theory on Possible Selves, Markus and Nurius (1986) elaborated on this future-oriented aspect, accentuating the fact that ideas about the future, both positive (the self one would very much like to become) and negative (the self one fears to become), influence sensemaking narratives in the present.

Researchers focusing on the attitudes of (beginning) teachers have recognized the influence of the past and the expected future on becoming a teacher (e.g. Cole & Knowles, 1993; Conway, 2001; Hamman et al., 2013). Studies on the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975), pre-conceptions (Wubbels, 1992) and beliefs (Mansfield & Volet, 2010; Pajares, 1992) have shown that past experiences significantly influence teachers’ ideas and acts. Accordingly, several researchers have stressed the importance of reflection and anticipation in teacher education to reduce the practice shock often experienced when entering the teaching profession (Conway, 2001; Korthagen et al., 2001; Stokking, Leenders, De Jong, & Van Tartwijk, 2003). In this study, we aim to add to this body of knowledge on the attitudes of beginning teachers by exploring how student teachers differ in the way they perceive the past and expect the future while making sense of oneself as a teacher.

2.3. Continuity and discontinuity

The main motive when making sense of oneself is to establish a sense of continuity: realizing coherence in the understanding of one’s self over time (Caspi & Moffitt, 1991; Markus & Wurf, 1987; McAdams, 1993; Zittoun et al., 2013). A sense of continuity is

central to a person's sense of well-being, as without a sense of permanence maintaining a coherent self-concept would be impossible. A sense of continuity is also functional, as it is "crucial for our ability to learn from past experience, to take moral responsibility for our behavior and choices, and to plan future action" (Sani, 2008, p. 3).

The sense of continuity can be disturbed, for instance when a "rapid succession of new experiences challenge existing schema, attitudes, and adaptation patterns and thus lead to change" (Caspi & Roberts, 2001, p. 51). Akkerman and Meijer (2011) conceptualized such a challenge as a sense of discontinuity: a perceived lack of rational connection or cohesion of the self over time. A sense of discontinuity can result in feelings of ambiguity or uncertainty, and Caspi and Moffitt (1991) argued that individuals will, accordingly, aim for re-establishing the continuity of the self. Such mechanisms as cognitive conservatism (preserving what is already registered about the self) and the associated confirmation bias (managing new information selectively so that existing opinions are confirmed), as Greenwald and Pratkanis (1984) described in socio-psychological research, illustrate this.

Several studies on the development of student teachers show how experiences can challenge the self-concept and, accordingly, trigger a sense of discontinuity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Beijaard et al., 2004). Pillen et al. (2013) presented 13 types of discrepancies between ideas, personality and values and the encountered social and cultural working condition that "can be very serious and may have a great influence on beginning teachers' learning and functioning" (p. 6). The consequences of sensed discontinuity can be potentially severe: teachers can suffer feelings of uncertainty and low self-esteem (Hargreaves, 2005; Pillen et al., 2013; Zembylas, 2003) and/or feelings of self-doubt and confusion about the profession (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006).

3. Research question

In this study we aim to explore differences in the extent to which the self-concept of student teachers is already challenged as they start the teacher education program. This will add to our understanding of the scope and applicability of labels such as "strenuous" and "challenging" on different student teachers at the start of teacher education. For this we will describe how student teachers, upon entering teacher education, perceive positive and negative characteristics as well as past and expected experiences. The central question directing this study is as follows: How do reported self-concepts of student teachers at the start of teacher education differ between student teachers in terms of their expressed characteristics, their perceptions of the past and the future and their sense of dis/continuity?

4. Method

4.1. Participants and context

Thirty-five student teachers, who were enrolled in a post-graduate, one-year teacher education program of a Dutch research university, participated in this study. We based our selection of the student teachers on the availability of the assignment used in this study at the start of the study (see the section Data below). The teacher education program supports student teachers in obtaining a subject-matter specific teaching license at the master level, which allows them to teach at all levels of secondary education in the Netherlands. Among the 35 participants, student teachers represented all subject-matter tracks that the program offers (including history, geography, modern languages, mother tongue, music, and science subjects). The group of participants included twenty-four student teachers between 20 and 30 years

old, seven student teachers between 31 and 45 years old, and four student teachers between 46 and 58 years old. Nine of these student teachers participated in an "alternative certification" version of the program (Tigchelaar, Brouwer, & Korthagen, 2008).

The teacher education program is characterized by a strong emphasis on learning from practice, using strategies to stimulate reflection with the aim to connect practice and theory. Scholars have referred to this as a realistic approach towards teacher education (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Korthagen et al., 2001). As part of the supervision and assessment process, teacher-educators instruct student teachers to include several documents in their portfolios that address aspects of their self-concepts as teachers (Van Tartwijk, Van Rijswijk, Tuithof, & Driessen, 2008).

4.2. Data

Data on the 35 student teachers' self-concepts were derived from narratives in the student teachers' portfolios: their teacher profiles. A teacher profile is a text written by a student teacher at the start of the teacher education program, in which he or she reflects on the central question: "Who do you think you are as a teacher?" In line with research on career autobiographies, we considered the personal narrative produced for the teacher profile assignment as an expressed self-concept of the student teacher as a teacher (Rehfuss, 2009).

An important design principle for the teacher profile instruction, which was included in the portfolio manual, was that the instruction in the assignment should stimulate student teachers to produce rich (i.e. diverse and illustrative) as well as authentic texts. To develop the instruction, six student teachers (not included in the data set of this study) participated in a pilot study in which three different types of instructions were evaluated. One instruction invited student teachers to describe themselves as teachers in terms of their characteristics, norms, values, and ideals, and strong and weak points. The second instruction invited student teachers to reflect on an authentic situation, to elaborate on the significance of the situation for their sense making as teachers and to take the perspective of others, such as mentors, on their teacher characteristics into account. The third instruction was very open, presenting only the central question of the teacher profile.

The first author interviewed all six student teachers about the pilot instruction and the strategy employed while completing the task. The first and third author analyzed the six texts produced in the pilot study concerning characteristics and dis/continuities mentioned in the texts and concerning the richness and sincerity of the texts. The researchers discussed the benefits of each instruction and the value of the texts produced in light of the underlying research questions. Consequently, the most promising elements of the three pilot instructions for answering our research questions were selected and combined into the final instruction.

The final instruction included prompts that invited student teachers to describe characteristics, strong and weak points in their teacher conduct, values and norms, and the perspective of significant others. Two independent researchers, who also work as teacher educators, carefully studied the final instruction and agreed that it was clear and understandable. The instruction for the profile was included in the portfolio manual after ensuring that all teacher educators involved agreed that the instrument aligned with the tenor of other assignments in the teacher education program. The manual made clear that supervisors did not take the teacher profile into account for assessment purposes but served as input for supervision.

4.3. Analysis

All profiles were coded using the software program Atlas.ti. First,

we coded all characteristics: a qualification of the student teacher about him- or herself. Next, we divided all characteristics into two categories: (1) general characteristics pertaining to the person, not explicitly used in the context of becoming or being a teacher, and (2) profession specific characteristics explicitly linked to that person becoming or being a teacher. In a quote such as “I am an enthusiast, social, serious, dedicated and focused person,” we would code five general characteristics. In a quote such as “I am a teacher who starts from high subject knowledge demands and a good cooperation with students” we would code two profession specific characteristics. Some characteristics looked similar, e.g. “enthusiastic” and “enthusiasm for”, but we coded them as different characteristics because the actual words differed and we wanted to capture the idiosyncratic self-characterization of student teachers. Finally, we added an evaluative code to each characteristic. We coded a characteristic as “Positive” whenever it was considered a strength. We coded a characteristic “Ambiguous” whenever the student teacher considered it a strength and a weakness at the same time. A characteristic was coded “Negative” whenever the student teacher considered it to be a weakness, and as “Neutral” whenever it did not seem to have an evaluative connotation.

After coding the characteristics, we divided each profile into passages: units of meaning pertaining to one theme or subject. We coded the temporal dimension of each passage, distinguishing passages referring to the past, passages referring the present, passages referring to the future, and passages that had jumbled and/or connected references to the past, present and future.

The first author then summarized all of the teacher profiles. For each profile, she clustered remarks referring to, respectively, the past, the present, and the future. After this, she categorized all references made to the past by means of purposefully comparing and contrasting the references (Boeije, 2002). This categorization resulted in a table containing four categories of perceptions of the past (see Table 2). The same was done for all expressed expectations of the future in the 35 profiles, which resulted in Table 3. Finally, for each of the 35 profiles, the first author determined the dominant perception of the past and the dominant expectation of the future. The dominance was determined by considering the emphasis throughout the entire profile, establishing which reference was most elaborated on

this study, performed the audit. She was given access to the raw data (35 teacher profiles), the processed data (files in Atlas.ti), and all data summaries that were the basis for the result section in this article. After familiarizing herself with the analysis and the processed data, the auditor checked all steps of the analysis by randomly selecting examples of the raw and processed data. She assured that the several stages of the processed data could be reliably related to the original data set and concluded that the reported results are transparently and reliably grounded in the data.

5. Results

The average length of the 35 teacher profiles was 1014 words. Five teacher profiles contained fewer than 500 words (minimum 424 words) and six profiles contained more than 1500 words (maximum 2075 words). Below, we describe (1) the characteristics in the 35 profiles, (2) the perceptions of the past found in the profiles, (3) the expectations of the future, and (4) how these perceptions and expectations combine in sensed dis/continuity. We illustrate our findings with quotes from the profiles.

5.1. Characteristics in the teacher profiles

In the 35 profiles, student teachers mentioned a total of 346 different characteristics. The total number of general characteristics mentioned in the teacher profiles was 167. The total number of profession specific characteristics was 179. Except for the characteristic “strict,” which was used nine times in the total of 35 profiles, no characteristic was used more than five times.

In seven profiles, student teachers mentioned more than ten general characteristics (the highest number being 21), while in six profiles, student teachers did not mention any general characteristics. In three profiles, student teachers mentioned more than 10 different profession specific characteristics (the highest number being 18), while in two profiles, the student teachers did not mention any profession specific characteristics. Table 1 provides an overview of the evaluations connected to the characteristics mentioned in the profiles.

Table 1
Evaluation of the general and profession specific characteristics in the 35 teacher profiles.

Characteristics	Total (346)	Strength (247)	Weakness (52)	Ambiguous (44)	Neutral (3)
General characteristics	167	101	36	27	2
Profession specific characteristics	179	146	16	17	1

and represented the final conclusion of the profile (see Table 4).

We followed an audit procedure to ascertain transparency and reliability with regard to all aspects of the analysis of the data set (Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2008). For this, the first author made an audit trail, that is, a detailed account of the data and of all steps and procedures followed in the analysis (Poortman & Schildkamp, 2012). An independent researcher, not involved in

5.2. Perceptions of the past

In the summaries of the 35 teacher profiles, we identified four different perceptions of the past. Table 2 shows in how many of the 35 profiles we found each type of reference. A profile can contain more than one type of reference to the past.

Table 2
Perceptions of the past in the 35 teacher profiles.

Occurrence ^a	Reported about the past	Description	Expressing a sense of
13	Consistency related to characteristics	References that reflect certainty and confidence about specific characteristics and abilities as they became known prior to teacher education.	Continuity
27	Consistency related to experiences	References to specific experiences with teaching, with other professional experiences and/or as a student.	Continuity
5	No past	No description of the past	Discontinuity
7	Problems in the past	References about negative characteristics and problems that reflect weak teacher conduct.	Discontinuity

^a Number of profiles in which this way of addressing the past occurred.

5.2.1. Consistency related to characteristics

In these references, student teachers describe their development as a teacher, leading up to the position they are in now. The references include remarks on their personality, presented and illustrated through general characteristics. For example, one student teacher wrote:

The role of a university-trained teacher fits me because I am... very interested in theory, especially concerning pedagogical subject knowledge and general linguistic theories. This involves analytical and abstract thinking.

In consistency-related-to-characteristics-type references, we found student teachers elaborating on a dominant thread throughout their lives, for instance:

I am a historian in the sense that I want to know everything about background and history of development. In the end, I put everything in the context of fundamental life questions about being: what is the meaning of life, what does it mean to live a good life, what are just actions, how do we deal with suffering, sadness, pain, what is happiness, what gives meaning to (my) life. I have carried these questions with me since high school. I am fascinated by the answers my studies and personal introspection provided me with.

Specific personal attributes were explicitly considered relevant to take into account when starting teacher education, in these references.

5.2.2. Consistency related to experiences

In consistency-related-to-experiences-type references, student teachers expressed a sense of who they are as teachers in the present because of specific experiences in the past. Thirteen times these experiences pertained to experiences in the field of education. For example, one student teacher wrote:

In 2010, I followed an introductory course for teaching at the teacher education institute. Because of this, I was able to get briefly acquainted with education. Now I have been at a practice school for a number of weeks... where I have given about ten complete lessons. I notice that because of this I [now] have a fairly extensive image of me being a teacher.

This quote indicates that the teaching experience that the student teachers referred to does not necessarily need to be extensive (in this case not more than about sixteen lessons in total) in order for them to understand themselves as teachers.

Student teachers also referred to specific experiences in other jobs and/or professional settings (five times) to illustrate what is important in one's work or to illustrate professional abilities. For instance:

When I worked as a travel guide, teachers often participated in my groups. The feedback I regularly received was that they could imagine me working as a teacher.

In this quote, the student teacher describes her characteristics as a professional while working in a non-educational setting. She considers being a teacher suitable because experienced teachers predicted a fit between her and the profession.

Nine times student teachers addressed specific experiences they encountered as students. One student teacher wrote:

I often feel disturbed when other teachers are being inconsistent. I want to be consistent in my behavior so students will know what they can expect. I also conclude this because of what I liked as a student myself.

5.2.3. No past

In five teacher profiles, student teachers did not address the past when expressing their thoughts about who they are as teachers. A possible explanation for this lies in the following quote:

It is still too early to discuss with my school mentor how she sees me as a teacher because I have not taught a lesson yet and therefore I have not called up an impression.

The author does not seem to regard non-educational experiences in the past as necessary to mention when writing about being a teacher in the present or future. This suggests a lack of connection between the past and the present with regard to the aim to become a teacher.

5.2.4. Problems in the past

In seven profiles, student teachers included experiences from the past that made their professional conduct as a teacher questionable and potentially problematic. By elaborating on weak points, the student teachers openly acknowledged personal issues that could hinder their success as a teacher. One student teacher wrote:

The outside world thinks of me as a tough and confident young woman who is not afraid to speak up. To some extent, this is true because of what I went through, but as soon as it gets really difficult and I have to control myself in a professional setting, I often take on a role. Despite the fact that this is not visible to anyone but a psychologist, I sometimes wonder if I am a genuine person.

For student teachers who addressed weak points and problems in the past, starting the teacher education program seemed to be connected to avoiding certain behavior, as one student teacher wrote:

I think people say about me that I am easy to approach, but hard to fathom. Sometimes a crisis is needed to "really" get to know me. Starting my educational program, I will do whatever it takes to prevent this from happening and be open and absorb all new knowledge.

In problems-in-the-past-type references, student teachers reported a need to undergo profound changes in order to become a teacher.

In summary, the student teachers who expressed consistency-related-to-characteristics type references and consistency-related-to-experiences-type references demonstrated perceived continuity in development from the past to the present. Student teachers who did not refer to the past or who expressed problems-in-the-past type references demonstrated perceived discontinuity in development from the past to the present, in, respectively, an implicit (no-past) or an explicit (problems-in-the-past) form. Before looking more closely at how perceptions of the past are related to the way these student teachers look upon the future, we will present four different expectations of the future as found in the teacher profiles.

5.3. Expectations of the future

We identified four different expectations of the future in the 35 teacher profiles. Table 3 shows these four types of references, including a description of the nature of the reference pertaining to both development as a teacher (becoming) in the future as well as the state as a teacher (being) in the future. Table 3 also indicates in how many of the 35 profiles student teachers used each reference. Again, please note that some profiles contained more than one type of expectation of the future.

Table 3

Expectations of the future in the 35 teacher profiles.

Occurrence ^a	Reported with respect to the future	Description	Expressing a sense of
5	Confidence	References indicating clarity and certainty of expected characteristics and professional conduct as a teacher and indicating confidence in a continuous development.	Continuity
15	Development	References indicating probability of anticipated characteristics and professional conduct as a teacher and indicating a phased nature of the developmental trajectory.	Continuity
14	Goals	References indicating pursued characteristics and professional conduct, without specific information about what it will take to reach these goals.	Discontinuity
10	Challenges	References problematizing the feasibility of required characteristics and professional conduct and the developmental trajectory towards this.	Discontinuity

^a Number of profiles in which this way of addressing the future occurred.

5.3.1. Confidence

The confidence-type references included comments about trust in becoming and being a teacher. Student teachers emphasized what they wanted and would do in order to develop as a teacher. The references imply that being a teacher means focusing on improvement and expanding abilities that are part of who one is already. For example, one student teacher wrote:

I do not want to become the best and nicest teacher, but only the best teacher I can be, given my possibilities. A teacher who is involved with his students, who can adapt to them and at the same time monitor the learning process of the group as well as the individual students.

The confidence-type references included remarks about the continuous nature of development as a teacher.

5.3.2. Development

Expectations indicating development included comments about the probability of being a teacher in the future and having a clear image of the nature of the developmental trajectory towards this. One student teacher wrote:

As a teacher I want to be someone who can motivate students by showing them the relevance of the subject. This can be different for every student and I suspect this will demand something of my creativity.

Student teachers expected the developmental trajectory to be an intensive process that needs attention and experience:

I am curious to know how you can create an atmosphere during a lesson in which you can transfer this sense of trust and safety without having to make this explicit. . . I think this is something that has to happen naturally and that has to do with a personal connection.

In these references, student teachers expressed the feeling that being a teacher would happen although they acknowledged that this development would take time.

5.3.3. Goals

Expectations that were categorized as goals, concerned remarks about what the student teachers want as teachers, what is important, and/or what one must do or not do as a teacher. The focus of the expectation was on the future professional conduct as a teacher. In the words of one student teacher:

I close my eyes and let my thoughts run wild ... Before me I see three of my former students talking to each other, 15 years after graduating. They are a success in society as well as personally.

Thinking aloud about their high school years, reminiscing about former teachers, one of them mentions my name: – Do you still know Ms. vD? No matter how tired and obnoxious we were at the end of the day, she always knew how to motivate us. I always visited her lessons with great pleasure and was always disappointed when the hour ended. All the thought-experiences we did and the dilemmas we discussed were very interesting for me.

In the goal-type references, the student teachers specified the objective but included hardly any information about what it will take to reach specific goals. The goal-type references suggest that obtaining new skills and qualities is necessary, but they did not comment on the developmental trajectory towards these characteristics.

5.3.4. Challenges

In challenges-type references the student teachers addressed the future as uncertain or even problematic, as one student teacher illustrated:

I will find it hard to give all students equal attention and to treat them all the same without a noticeable judgment. I am strong-minded and I often give my opinion.

In this quote, the student teacher suggests that certain characteristics of the present self may impede becoming a teacher. In challenges-type expectations, student teachers noted how fundamental change is necessary for them to become a teacher.

In summary, in the first two types of expectations presented in Table 3 (confidence and development), student teachers expected continuity in development from the present towards the future. In the third and fourth types (goals and challenges), the student teachers suggested discontinuity in development.

5.4. Combinations of perceptions of the past and expectations of the future

For each profile, we determined the most dominant perception

of the past and expectation of the future, as we described in the analysis part of the method section. Table 4 presents the combinations of perceptions of the past and expectations of the future that were found in the profiles.

Table 4

Overview of the dominant perceptions of the past and the dominant expectations of the future.

Reference to the past	Expectation of the future				
	Confidence	Development	Goals	Challenges	
Consistency related to characteristic	3 ^I	2 ^{II}	3 ^I	0 ^{II}	Continuity
Consistency related to experiences	0 ^{III}	9 ^{IV}	5 ^{III}	5 ^{IV}	
No past	0 ^I	0 ^{II}	3 ^I	2 ^{II}	Discontinuity
Problems in the past	0 ^{III}	0 ^{IV}	0 ^{III}	3 ^{IV}	
		Continuity	Discontinuity		

The combinations of perceptions of the past and expectations of the future in A^I, A^{IV}, D^I, and D^{IV} illustrate four intuitively logical self-concepts as teachers at the start of teacher education: (1) In the three profiles in A^I, we noted a combination of dominant perceptions of consistency-related-to-characteristics and confidence, suggesting that for these student teachers entering teacher education is a logical step in finalizing their development as a teacher; (2) In nine profiles, categorized in A^{IV}, we noted a combination of dominant perceptions of consistency-related-to-experiences and expectations of development in the future, suggesting that for these student teachers development during teacher education means lengthening the development they started before; (3) In three profiles, categorized as D^I, the student teachers included no references to the past and focused mainly on the goals that they needed to meet in order to become a teacher; and (4) In three profiles, categorized in D^{IV}, we noted a combination of dominant perceptions of the past as problematic for becoming a teacher and the expectation that in the future challenges would also occur. Student teachers showing this combination felt fundamental, personal changes were needed in order to become a teacher. These four types of self-concepts made up 51% of the total combinations found in the teacher profiles, meaning that 49% of the combinations expressed a variant of these combinations.

Nineteen profiles contained a dominant perception of consistency-related-to-experiences (A^{IV}, C^{III}, and C^{IV}). Ten profiles combined this perception of the past with the expectation that becoming a teacher means starting something new. For five of these ten profiles, C^{III}, this seems to mean that they must meet specific goals in order to become a teacher, and for five others, C^{IV}, this seems to imply that they must solve some problems.

5.5. The expressed sense of dis/continuity in the teacher profiles

Following the combinations of perceptions of the past and expectations of the future, the profiles are distinctive in expressing a sense of dis/continuity. Table 4 illustrates how in 14 profiles (A)

student teachers expressed a general sense of continuity. This indicates that those student teachers perceived their entry into teacher education as fitting with their perceived past and future development. In contrast, in eight profiles (D), student teachers

expressed a general sense of discontinuity, suggesting that the teacher education program marked the start of a new and challenging development. In the remaining 13 profiles (B), student teachers expressed an ambiguous sense of perceived continuity and expected discontinuity. As one might expect, in no profiles did student teachers express an ambiguous sense of perceived discontinuity and expected continuity (C).

6. Discussion

This study aimed at exploring student teachers' characteristics, perceptions of the past and of the future, and issues of dis/continuity in the expressed sense of self as a teacher. Teacher profiles of 35 student teachers were considered and analyzed as expressed self-concepts at the start of the teacher education program.

The reported self-concepts revealed a large variety of general and profession specific characteristics. This variety is consistent with the idiosyncratic nature of students teachers' self-concepts described in earlier research (Alsup, 2006). A substantial number of student teachers openly mentioned precarious characteristics. In literature about reflection and its role in teacher learning, Kelchtermans (2009) considered such a critical stance beneficial for achieving a realistic outtake on one's abilities as a teacher.

We identified four types of perceptions of the past and four types of expectations of the future throughout the 35 profiles and found that the majority of the 35 student teachers already understood themselves at least partly as teachers at the start of the teacher education program. Contrary to what we conceptually expected based on people's inner needs to create continuity of self over time in narrative processing (e.g., Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Zittoun et al., 2013), we found that some student teachers did not refer to the past at all in their teacher profiles, but only to expectations of their future.

Nine different combinations between dominant perceptions of the past and expectations of the future were found in the teacher profiles, illustrative of three types of sensed dis/continuity: 1) a

general sense of continuity, 2) an ambiguous sense of perceived continuity and expected discontinuity and 3) a general sense of discontinuity. This framework of sensed dis/continuity shows how student teachers' differ in identifying with the profession at the start of teacher education. This is relevant because an individual perceives (new) experiences selectively and in relationship to (past) self-concepts (e.g. McLean & Pasupathi, 2011). Taking into account the human tendency to strive for continuity of self, we believe that student teachers will likely try to maintain their current self-concept during teacher education, even if the self-concept contains unrealistic beliefs and expectations about themselves as teachers (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Zittoun et al., 2013).

Profiles that contained a general sense of continuity suggested a positive attitude towards coming to identify with the profession. Researchers have found that such a positive attitude is preferable when student teachers move into subsequent professional development (Judge, 2009; Onafowora, 2005). It could, however, also hamper these student teachers in realistically considering adjustments that they might need to successfully function as a teacher (Caspi & Roberts, 2001; Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984). When self-confidence is very strong, student teachers could fall under the spell of a false sense of infallibility, which is associated with chalking away negative experiences as "just part of the progress" (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984). Some might need to experience a major crisis to disrupt this sense of continuity, which could lead to harmful effects, such as leaving teacher education (Alsop, 2006; Beijaard et al., 2004; Meijer, 2011).

In the student teachers' profiles that showed an ambiguous sense of perceived continuity and expected discontinuity, becoming a teacher is perceived as a changeable process, containing specific points of improvement. For these student teachers, experiences in the past seemed to make the tensions that can be encountered in practice more tangible. Reflecting on the past for these student teachers could make possible future difficulties more concrete. These findings add a note of caution to the literature that calls for the use of reflection on autobiographic experiences during teacher education (Hammerness et al., 2005). Notably, reconsidering former experiences when developing as a teacher can add to a sense of discontinuity for some student teachers and consequently can trigger feelings of uncertainty (Zembylas, 2003).

Student teachers who expressed a general sense of discontinuity in their profiles confirmed the belief that becoming a teacher is perceived as a new and challenging process. For these student teachers, the past seemed to contain no grounds or even impediments for a self-concept as a teacher and the future seemed uncertain and challenging. Whether this might be a realistic expectation or an expectation that will prove to be overly pessimistic, it can also function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. This can hamper further development as expected failure is likely to influence the way new experiences are encountered and interpreted (Conway, 2001; Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984). Then again, it can be argued that it is beneficial that these student teachers are aware of the possible challenges that are part of becoming a teacher. They seem to recognize that they will need to put forth a thorough effort to deal with these obstacles and that they must be open to change (Hargreaves, 2005).

To summarize, this study of the self-concepts of student teachers, focusing on perceptions and expectations of becoming a teacher, provided a framework that supports the understanding of differences between student teachers at the start of teacher education. Various perceptions of the past and expectations of the future were found to determine differences in sensed dis/continuity, illustrating how student teachers differ in identifying with the profession at the threshold of developing as a teacher.

6.1. Implications for teacher education

We feel the framework of sensed dis/continuity can enrich the awareness of teacher educators about differences between student teachers in terms of self-concepts and expectations, already at the start of teacher education. Teacher educators could examine if the student teachers' expressed sense of dis/continuity is realistic and, together with them, explore goals and future actions. Consequently, the results can be useful for adaptive supervision (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Meijer, 2011). For student teachers who expect discontinuity, organizing experiences that contribute to a sense of success and accomplishment could be helpful (Korthagen, 2004; Korthagen et al., 2001). Assisting them with guided reflection that explicitly calls to mind experiences and abilities that testify to the feasibility of becoming a teacher could also be helpful. For student teachers who perceive and expect continuity, exploring and discussing tensions reported by their peers could be helpful and might even prevent more severe "practice shocks" later on (Pillen et al., 2013; Stokking et al., 2003).

6.2. Limitations and future research

Questions about whether sensed dis/continuity is indeed realistic and how it relates to further development during teacher education deserve further exploration. More specifically, researchers could focus on the predictive qualities of the types of sensed dis/continuity and on their applicability in analyzing self-concepts in later stages of the teacher education program and/or in other settings, such as the practice environment. Researchers could then also focus on how supervisors, in and beyond the teacher education program, consider the types of sensed dis/continuity presented in this article instrumental for supporting the development of student teachers (Beltman et al., 2011; Pillen et al., 2013).

We argue, based on the findings of this study, that there are several layers researchers should explore and question when promoting the notion of anticipatory reflection and its effects on retaining a healthy optimism about the future as a teacher (Conway, 2001). Besides a primary questioning of how student teachers anticipate and what expectations they have, a second question should be to what extent these expectations are realistic. We suggest specific attention should be paid to student teachers who enter teacher education with previous professional or life experiences and the relationship between these specific experiences and their perceptions and expectations. Third, it is important to question and examine the impact of expectations on subsequent development. We know that people tend to selectively perceive and make sense of their experiences, partly based on their specific expectations. This can lead for example to self-fulfilling prophecies or a disregarding of information and feedback from situations that could be relevant for reflection and development.

As one's self-concept is dynamic, contextual, and temporal (Leary & Tangney, 2003), we want to stress that researchers and teacher educators should take caution when typifying student teachers' expressed self-concepts. Although a self-concept pertains partly to a relatively stable core of dispositional characteristics, it also changes continuously as student teachers have new experiences and interactions with others in and outside the context of teacher education (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). The results articulated in this article thus reflect these student teachers' self-concepts as explicated in written form at a specific moment and in a specific context. Profiles written a week, or maybe even a day, later could display (slightly) different results, influenced by a renewed way of making sense of these experiences. The types of sensed dis/continuity presented in this article, however, illustrate how the self-

concepts of student teachers can differ on a more abstract level at the start of teacher education and can serve as an analytical lens for further exploring the process of making sense of oneself as a teacher.

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