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**Author(s):** Arvaja, Maarit; Sarja, Anneli; Rönnerberg, Paula

**Title:** Pre-service subject teachers' personal teacher characterisations after the pedagogical studies

**Year:** 2022

**Version:** Published version

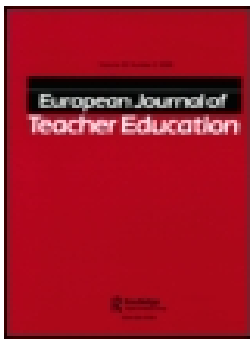
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**Please cite the original version:**

Arvaja, M., Sarja, A., & Rönnerberg, P. (2022). Pre-service subject teachers' personal teacher characterisations after the pedagogical studies. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(5), 653-669. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1860010>



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To cite this article: Maarit Arvaja , Anneli Sarja & Paula Rönnerberg (2020): Pre-service subject teachers' personal teacher characterisations after the pedagogical studies, European Journal of Teacher Education, DOI: [10.1080/02619768.2020.1860010](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1860010)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1860010>



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## Pre-service subject teachers' personal teacher characterisations after the pedagogical studies

Maarit Arvaja<sup>a</sup>, Anneli Sarja<sup>a</sup> and Paula Rönnerberg<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland; <sup>b</sup>Department of Teacher Education, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

### ABSTRACT

This study explored how five pre-service subject teachers characterised themselves as teachers after completing their year-long pedagogical studies in a Finnish university. Our narrative analysis of the interview data showed that the students shared a social representation of a past teacher characterised by wide power and emotional distance between pupils and the teacher. The students differentiated themselves from this kind of teacher character, and rather positioned themselves as interactive and caring educators identifying with their own ideal teachers as well as meaningful learning experiences in the pedagogical studies. Consequently, the study showed that engaging pre-service subject teachers in critical dialogue and reflection helps them to avoid static categorisations of 'the teacher' and to become authors of their own teachership.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 April 2020

Accepted 29 November 2020



### KEYWORDS

Narrative analysis; pre-service teacher identity; teacher characteristics; teacher education

## Introduction

In the context of teacher education, supporting pre-service teachers' professional development focuses increasingly on students' personal perspectives and how they themselves make sense of their self as a teacher (e.g. Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Cohen 2010; Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011). By taking this more personal perspective, the emphasis is on the relevance of knowing oneself for the development and construction of one's teachership and teacher identity (Meijer, Korthagen, and Vasalos 2009). This focus on 'inner levels' such as teacher identity and mission rather than 'outer levels' such as teacher competencies is suggested to lead to deeper involvement in the professional learning process among pre-service teachers (Korthagen 2004).

In Finnish society, which is the context of this study, the teaching profession and teacher education are largely based on professional identity work supported by dialogue and reflection (e.g. Kostiaainen et al. 2018; Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011). The emphasis is on the relevance of individual experience supporting the meaning of authenticity in teaching practice, i.e. to take into consideration pre-service teachers' personalities, preferences, values and ways of being in the world (Cranton and Carusetta 2004; Cunliffe 2016). Providing students with meaningful learning experiences, that is, personally valued, rich and worthwhile learning experiences, is considered critical for pre-service

**CONTACT** Maarit Arvaja  [maarit.arvaja@jyu.fi](mailto:maarit.arvaja@jyu.fi)  Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä 40014, Finland

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teachers' development and necessitates learning environments that are both interactive and participative (Kostiainen et al. 2018). However, as Kostiainen et al. (2018) argue, there is little research on how these new approaches are working and how they are experienced by pre-service teachers.

Our study focuses on how pre-service subject teachers characterise and make sense of themselves as prospective teachers after completing their yearlong pedagogical studies. The pedagogical studies were implemented interactively based on the approach of phenomenon- and inquiry-based learning in a Finnish university (e.g. Kostiainen et al. 2018; Tynjälä et al. 2016). We study preservice subject teachers' personal teacher characterisations by leaning on a dialogical approach to narrative self-construction (Wortham 2001). In this connection, we explore how the pedagogical studies and the students' past school experiences are positioned (voiced and evaluated) in the students' narratives (interviews) in characterising themselves as certain kinds of teachers.

## Theoretical background

According to Flores and Day (2006), during teacher education the students hold a pre-professional identity that consists of images of teachers, initial beliefs and concepts of a good teacher, and implicit theories of teaching and learning. The students have their own personalised experiences of schools, teachers and teacher-student relationship that inevitable play a role in their teacher characterisations. Embedded in the personalised experiences students lean also on different social representations (Martikainen 2019), cultural ideals (Akkerman and Meijer 2011) and cultural models (Gee 2010) of teachers and teaching that are shared.

In his study based on teachers' and students' drawings, Martikainen (2019) explored social representations of teachership. Building on the ideas of Moscovici (2001) Martikainen (2019) argues that teachers and students lean on social representations which are determined by the values and norms of the community developed over a long period of time. These socially constructed and culturally shared conceptions of teachership are often unconscious and therefore hardly ever questioned (Gee 2000). Martikainen (2019) found out that teachers' and students' social representations differed partly from each other. Students' drawings represented three teacher types: formal and authoritarian, bored and indifferent as well as friendly and communicative teacher. Teachers' drawings represented expert teacher, social and multitasking teacher as well as friendly and communicative teacher. It seems that teachers' representations reflected the current ideals in the Finnish educational system (e.g. Lipponen and Kumpulainen 2011; Tynjälä et al. 2016), such as narrow power distance and equality between students and teachers, whereas students' representations leaned also on more traditional values, such as power and emotional distance between students and teachers (Martikainen 2019). This finding may indicate a kind of a transition or hybrid space where traditional and current ideals on learning and teaching are in a state of flux (Arvaja and Sarja 2020) as (traditional) social representations are deeply rooted in the school culture and laborious to change (Martikainen 2019). In addition, in practice, teaching is not always as student-centred as official educational policy suggests (Martikainen 2019). The teacher and pupil

positionings are continuously negotiated in the situated school context and teacher-pupil interaction (Castanheira et al. 2007; Kayi-Aydar and Miller 2018).

We see that teacher characteristics, as part of one's teacher identity, are narratively and dialogically constructed (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Wortham 2001) and this construction always involves connecting the past, the present and the future (Flores and Day 2006; Lee and Schallert 2016). Teacher characteristics are not fixed and predefined; rather, they are connected to teacher's personal narrative and experiences in social and cultural contexts. They are continuously negotiated and reshaped in interaction with others (others broadly speaking; other people, groups, institutions, educational contents, cultural categories, etc.) in the process of becoming a teacher (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004; Lee and Schallert 2016; Wortham 2001). In this process, pre-service teachers' personal experiences, interests, values and beliefs relative to one's professional self are reflected in connection with external conditions regarding their studies, practice schools and views of schools in general (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004; Vähäsantanen 2015). Past experiences in teaching and teachers are used as a reflective mirror for evaluating new insights and experiences coming from teacher education (Lee and Schallert 2016). Through this process, pre-service teachers begin to refine their initial concepts of teaching and teachers, and create themselves as a teacher. Therefore, both personal and contextual (social and cultural) factors shape professional identity negotiations, and influence how pre-service teachers perceive and characterise themselves as future professionals (Flores and Day 2006; Meijer, Korthagen, and Vasalos 2009; Vähäsantanen 2015).

Consequently, in teacher education we should take a more holistic approach in educating teachers and support the personal growth of the pre-service teachers (Korthagen 2004; Meijer, Korthagen, and Vasalos 2009). Supporting pre-service teachers own personal growth calls for focusing more on the ideals of the students, their professional calling but also on the limitations and tensions they see with regard to their own teacher identities and cultural contexts of schools (Flores and Day 2006; Korthagen 2004). At its best, engaging pre-service teachers in reflective identity work (Cohen 2010) helps them become aware of their core qualities, i.e. deeply felt, personal values, and leads to conscious decisions to make use and live up according to those values and goals (Korthagen 2004). The importance of reflection lies in supporting deeper self-understanding leading to new awareness and more conscious activity as regards teaching (Korthagen 2004). Reflection also helps students consciously direct their development in coherence with their personal self (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Arvaja 2016; Korthagen 2004).

In dialogical and reflective learning approaches, emphasis is placed on socially and culturally mediated experiences. In reflective practice, new knowledge is created and recreated through dialogue in a social context with the perspectives of others (Dyke 2009; Miettinen 2000, 70). Accordingly, the reflection of prior experiences emerges when routine ways of thinking and doing are no longer sufficient, which evokes feelings of uncertainty (Miettinen 2000). For pedagogical purposes, space for critical reflection is created by some problem-at-hand (controversial viewpoints, concepts, etc.) or challenging situations. Practitioners often perceive these as turning points, and in educational research these have also been called as disorienting dilemmas (Mezirov 1991), or moments of being struck (Cunliffe 2016). In other words, the development of critical

reflection is facilitated by the prevalence of authentic practice connected with the transformative teachership. According to Cranton (2016), for instance, the notion of authenticity is a component of good teaching, the teacher's development as an individual and as a teacher. Authenticity refers to an ongoing process of transformation where teachers can move from a fragmented self towards a more mature authenticity (Cranton and Carusetta 2004).

The present study leans on a dialogical approach to narrative self-construction (Wortham 2001) in exploring how five pre-service subject teachers characterise themselves as prospective teachers after completing their year-long pedagogical studies based on reflective and dialogical approaches. Building on Bakhtin's (1981) and social constructionist views (e.g. Hermans 2003; Gergen 1994), the dialogical approach to narrative self-construction sees that the self is constructed through relationships with others and emerges through constant interactional positioning with respect to others (others broadly speaking). The exploration of the students' narratives (interviews) is guided by the following questions:

As what kinds of teachers do the pre-service subject teachers characterise themselves after completing their pedagogical studies?

In characterising themselves as certain kinds of teachers, how are the pedagogical studies positioned (voiced and evaluated) in the students' narratives?

In characterising themselves as certain kinds of teachers, how are the past school experiences (e.g. own teachers or social representations of teachers) positioned (voiced and evaluated) in the students' narratives?

## Methods

### *Contexts and the participants*

The study was conducted during the yearlong pedagogical studies of pre-service subject teachers (See also Arvaja and Sarja 2020). The selected target group comprised five students (three males and two females) from the respective disciplines of biology, languages, mathematics and history. In Finnish universities, prospective subject teachers from different disciplines embark on yearlong pedagogical studies at the Teacher Education Department in addition to their master-level subject studies in their respective departments. The combination of Bachelor's degree studies of about three years (180 ECTS) and master's degree studies of about two years (120 ECTS) in appropriate subjects, added with teacher's pedagogical studies (60 ECTS), qualifies the graduates to work as subject teachers at various levels of education.

The teacher studies consist of a number of courses in education and in-school practice periods. The curriculum is based on dialogical and reflective learning approaches and includes studies in educational sciences (consisting of different courses) and studies in subject-specific pedagogy and research, together with supervised teaching practice, usually in a Teacher Training School. The aim is to educate pedagogically thinking teachers capable of critical reflection on the issues of teaching and learning, and able to make improvements in practice when necessary. This research-based practise is manifested in the form of inquiry- and phenomenon-based learning. The student teachers work in multidisciplinary groups (like our target group) throughout the studies. One

purpose of using this setting is to lower the boundaries between different subject areas and study the phenomenon interactively through discussions and various learning activities. In the courses, the student teachers work in on different theoretically and practically oriented themes. For example, in the course titled 'Social Interaction and Cooperation' the focus of learning is on the skills and knowledge of social interaction, and on the group process itself. The addressed themes include, for example, emotional presence as a key sense of belonging, facing challenging situations, group processes, and emotional work in groups (e.g. Kostianen et al. 2018; Tynjälä et al. 2016).

### **Data collection**

The main data comprised interviews with five prospective subject teachers from different disciplines (i.e. the target group) (See also Arvaja and Sarja 2020). The pedagogical studies teacher (one of the authors) selected this multidisciplinary group on a voluntary basis. The student group represented a typical group in the pedagogical studies. The researchers (two of the authors) did not act as pedagogical studies teachers, but they conducted the semi-structured interviews on themes such as the students' own school history, teacher-ship (e.g. conceptions, meaningful learning experiences, mission) and the pedagogical studies shortly after the end of these studies. All the interviews (lasting from 1 hour 14 minutes to 1 hour 35 minutes) were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were more conversational than strictly structured; the researchers positioned themselves and the students as having a sympathetic conversation rather than strictly a data-gathering session (cf. Wortham 2001). Therefore, to gain a deeper insight into the students' 'thinking, feelings and value considerations' as becoming teachers (Gee 2010), the researchers interactionally positioned themselves (Wortham 2001) close to the students by sharing their own experiences (e.g. past school experiences) and posing interpretive questions (e.g. 'do you feel that those experiences are relevant for you as a teacher?').

The complementary data consisted of audio recordings of the student group's discussions during activities in one selected course, 'Social Interaction and Cooperation', as well as students' group discussion based on researcher-given themes focused on evaluating the pedagogical studies. This data was not analysed but used mostly as an ethnographical background to gain a better understanding of the pedagogical studies and to interpret the students' perspectives and thoughts on these.

The students were informed about the aims and purpose of this study and consequent reporting. They gave their permission to use the data collected, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the students' real names or other data enabling personal identification are not reported.

### **Data analysis**

We applied Wortham's (2001) dialogical approach to narrative self-construction in analysing teacher characterisations in the data (See also Arvaja 2016). According to Wortham (2001), the self is narratively constructed through positioning different voices in the social world in relation to each other, and by positioning oneself with respect to these voices.

In the first step of the analysis, the transcribed interviews were read through several times. While reading the transcripts, the researcher (the first author) made notes pertaining to each student. The focus in approaching the data was on the students' narratives and descriptions of what kinds of prospective teachers they are or wish to be. The notes were then thematically grouped within a single data set. Three larger themes emerged repeatedly in the students' narratives: change in the way of seeing learning and teaching, teacher (and student) characteristics, and the interactive relationship between teachers and pupils. In this study the further analysis focused especially on the themes teacher (and student) characteristics and the interactive relationship between teachers and pupils. The change in the epistemological views (i.e. change in the way of seeing learning and teaching) is reported more closely in another study (Arvaja and Sarja 2020).

In the second step of the analysis, the thematically grouped data were approached through narrative analysis based on Wortham's (2001) ideas on dialogical approach to narrative self-construction (Arvaja 2016). Particularly two layers of narrative positioning, that is, voicing and evaluating, were analysed within the above named themes. In a narrative, both the narrator's and the other characters' voices are established. Therefore, student narratives were coded by identifying one's own voicing (i.e. characterising) and the voices of the relevant characters (e.g. real, significant and generalised others) as well as possible evaluation connected to these voices.

In the students' narratives, their own voiced characteristics were identified mostly by the use of the first-person pronouns (such as I, me, my) (Aveling, Gillespie, and Cornish 2015). The relevant characters in the students' narratives were seen as 'inner-others' whose voices belong to other individuals or groups (Aveling, Gillespie, and Cornish 2015). In line with the narrative approach, the terms 'character' and respective voices refer not only to (concretely) named individuals, groups or institutions and their voices, but also to cultural typifications, social representations or cultural models, for example (Gee 2010; Moscovici 2001; Wortham 2001). The voice(s) of a character can be seen to represent a recognisable social type or a recognisable type of people with their related characteristics, values, ideas or ideologies (Gee 2000; Wortham 2001). Identifying the others and their respective voices in the students' narratives were traced through the use of third-person pronouns, as well as through the students' quoting and naming of individuals, groups or institutions (Aveling, Gillespie, and Cornish 2015). According to Wortham (2001), a narrator often represents certain voices by using words that index particular social positions for certain characters. For example, one's past teachers may be voiced as emotionally distant characters: 'I don't feel that in my own schooldays I would have found it natural by any means that I would have gone and told my personal matters to a teacher', or a student can speak through the voice of the pedagogical studies by referring to the ideology behind the studies: 'educational responsibility related to the teacher's role'.

In positioning, the narrator places her/himself interactionally with respect to 'others' and their voices (Wortham 2001). Positioning oneself with reference to particular voices and their characterisations is often reinforced through evaluation (Wortham 2001). Therefore, evaluation related to the voicing of different others and the narrated self were also analysed in the students' narratives. Through evaluation, narrators establish varying degrees of distance by differentiating themselves from or identifying themselves with the voices in the narrative. This is revealed, for example, in negative or positive evaluations expressed explicitly ('a common denominator for all good teachers I have had



is that they have been genuinely what they are') or through other linguistic means, such as the selection of evaluative verbs or adjectives, or using certain evaluative, contextually loaded terms (e.g. 'transmission of knowledge'). (See more Wortham 2001, pp. 70–75).

The first author conducted the analysis. However, to ensure higher reliability and credibility (Guba 1981), the researcher discussed the analysis and interpretation of the data on several occasions with the other researcher and the pedagogical studies teacher during the analysis process. Moreover, we provide a large set of translated data examples to allow the readers to evaluate and judge the interpretations (Hammer and Berland 2014).

## Findings

The students' personal teacher characterisations are described and interpreted using the student narratives (interviews) mainly in light of the commonalities found in the data. However, in presenting the narratives, the focus is on those aspects that characterise each student. Hence, individual students are attributed with such voicing and evaluating that reoccur in their narrative and, thus, reinforce a particular sense of self (Wortham 2001). First, we present how the students characterise themselves as prospective teachers. After this, we show how the pedagogical studies and past school experiences are voiced and evaluated (positioned) in the students' personal teacher characterisations.

### *Students' personal teacher characterisations*

In the narratives, pre-service subject teachers build their teacher characterisations through the process of positioning (Wortham 2001). In her narrative, Aino, a prospective *language teacher*, voices the most important characteristics of a teacher and identifies herself with these features:

Aino : The prime responsibility of a teacher is to be present. Then I would argue further that this includes everything you do in the classroom. Pupils will certainly notice if you're not around and present or if you're not interested or you are like somewhere else in your thoughts. [...] The kind of basic interestedness and interaction with the pupils. Personally I find it somehow more important perhaps than always proceeding with the subject matter in front. If the atmosphere is poor and there's something going on in the classroom, so there is not much hope of learning, either. I hope myself that as a teacher I could be kind of safe and easy-to-approach. I think that anyway there's no need to be anything like that a pupil finds it threatening or pressuring and things like that.

Aino feels that her main task as a teacher is to be (emotionally) present. She wishes to be recognised as a safe and approachable teacher interested in her pupils. Also Elisa, another prospective *language teacher*, sees that most important for her as a teacher is to be an educator and to establish a high-quality interpersonal relationship with the pupils:

Elisa : Education, definitely [is most important]. Particularly the pupil-teacher relationship would be kind of easy-to-approach and trustworthy. Because I think that once this is in order so then you get your message across better. When the communication is like in order. As it can immediately rule out all possibilities [if this is not in order].

For Aino and Elisa, teacher characteristics like safe, trustworthy and easy to approach are ideals or core qualities (Korthagen 2004) to be pursued for their own sake ('more important perhaps than always proceeding with the subject matter in front'). Further, they see that having this *open interactive relationship* with the pupils is also a prerequisite for learning ('then you get your message across better').

Aapo, a prospective *history teacher*, and Lauri, a prospective *mathematics teacher*, describe a transformation in their thinking and views as becoming teachers (See also Arvaaja and Sarja 2020). In doing so, Aapo juxtaposes the voices of the past and present:

Aapo : It is somehow interesting to think that the original picture on the basis of which I sought to become a teacher was fairly different from the reality. I can't say that there was any negative, like, shocks, but it has changed a lot. My view of teachership was perhaps shaped more along these experiences of my own; I mean, what kind of teachers I had. It was more like a picture of a storyteller or lecturer, which might be somewhat different from what I have encountered here in the teacher studies. The view has become much deeper. [...] Well, absolutely the stronger role of learners [...] it is so much stronger or at least favoured nowadays, and people have ended up with this more student-centred [approach] based on learning-related research knowledge. [...] Then of course [is] the fact that I did not have perhaps such a strong and clear view on the educational responsibility related to the teacher's role. Then I used to think a bit narrowly, that it is just this teaching and transmission of knowledge.

The above description shows how in characterising himself as a teacher Aapo distances himself from the voice of his own history teacher (storyteller or lecturer) and adopts the voice of teacher education (e.g. student-centred [approach]) (Wortham 2001). In evaluating the new insights arising from his teacher studies, Aapo juxtaposes these with his past school experiences. Besides changes in pedagogic views, Aapo also talks about a change in terms of becoming aware of 'educational responsibility', referring to a more holistic view of the teacher's mission. Lauri describes a similar change:

Lauri : When I was starting mathematics in the first year, I had actually no insight about the teacher's work. I thought that it was more like just pouring the subject contents into the pupil's head. I have now indeed learnt to see that there's really everything else as well. [I have] learnt to appreciate that there would be some interaction and that one could reveal pupils' potential more broadly. More to education, you know, not prioritising the subject matter so much, but there are also other things at school.

In his characterisation Lauri refers to a traditional cultural model (Gee 2010) of teaching as 'pouring the subject contents into the pupil's head' (cf. Aapo's 'transmission of knowledge'). Now, he characterises himself as an educator rather than merely someone to deliver the subject matter. Aapo and Lauri explicitly narrate a transformation in their pedagogical thinking (Cunliffe 2016; Cranton 2016). This *educator characterisation* is voiced by all of the students, resonating with the ideas and ideologies of teacher education. Voicing themselves as prospective teachers, all the students see that being an educator, combined with establishing a good relationship with the pupils, is also a prerequisite for teaching a subject matter.

According to Olli, a prospective *biology teacher*, as well as Aino, the essential feature in creating a kind of embracing interaction and good relationship with the pupils requires abandoning the predefined teacher role:

Olli : It stems basically from meeting a person like, well you don't have to like everybody, but you have to get along with everybody. It's a clear guideline, which I have discussed myself as well. When you're nice to others, so most likely they are also nice to you. Take everybody like into consideration as they are, so that nobody needs to pretend to be anything they are not. [...] I want to do this in such a way that I don't need to wear any masks [...] So that I am also my own self and I'm not going to put on any teacher robe. I'll go for what I am and try to cope with it.

Aino : I would say that one of my realisations of this year was that in a way one somehow thinks that there are so many stereotypes pertaining to teachers [...] so I had this big realisation during an interaction course, to do the work through one's own personality. I found it so wonderful. It was really easy to go to the practice lessons and everywhere. In a way I don't need to change myself or develop any separate teacher role, that's perhaps the point.

Olli's and Aino's views demonstrate how the teacher characterisation is not an external role defined, determined and legitimised by institutional authorities (Gee 2000). Rather, teachership is actively constructed in interaction with the pupils (Castanheira et al. 2007) and resonating with one's personal sense of self (Arvaja 2016). In the above examples Olli and Aino associate certain implicit predefined characteristics with the cultural ideal (Akkerman and Meijer 2011) or social representation (Martikainen 2019) of a 'teacher'. Thus, they see the cultural ideal (traditional voice) as an accustomed image where a teacher assumes, at least partly, a predefined role. However, this conception is questioned during the studies, which shows in the renegotiation of teachership where the professional and personal senses of self are intertwined (Arvaja 2016). For Aino, this was a 'big realisation', a moment of being struck (Cunliffe 2016), during pedagogical studies.

In the students' discourse, the *educator positioning* with its main characteristics of creating a good quality relationship with the pupils and doing the work through one's own personality resonates with the ideas and ideology of the pedagogical studies. For the students, this more holistic approach to teachership – that is, intertwined teacher and educator positionings as well as personal and professional positionings – seems to be a meaningful experience manifested in new awareness and transformation in their thinking as prospective teachers (Cranton 2016).

### ***Pedagogical studies in negotiating personal teacher characterisations***

As can be seen from the data extracts presented above, the ideas and ideologies of the pedagogical studies are (often implicitly) reflected in the students' narrative self-constructions. Here, especially having an open interactive relationship with the pupils, the educator role, and the intertwined relationship of the personal and professional self are voiced and evaluated as important elements of being a teacher. From the pedagogical studies, especially the course Social Interaction and Cooperation (SIC) seems to provide meaningful experiences (Kostiainen et al. 2018) for the students in supporting and

constructing these teacher characteristics. Therefore, the course can be regarded as a voice of a significant other with its ideas, activities and practices in the students' sense making as a teacher. Next, we present how the SIC course is positioned in the students' narratives in characterising themselves as interactive and approachable educators.

For Olli and Aino a moment of being struck (Cunliffe 2016) on the importance of interaction and interactive skills in teacher's work takes place in the first (dramatised, non-traditional) lecture of the SIC course:

Olli : I was somehow like what an excellent lecture! [...] At that point I realised that this interaction and interaction skills are truly of great significance and that these [conflict] situations can be prevented and solved really easily when you just know these matters. Indeed, during this course in general, it has come up, this significance of interaction, how important it is in teacher's work and in daily life, too.

Aino : Somehow it has been highlighted how largely one can solve situations with these [interaction skills]. At least for me it was a mind-blowing realisation then in the first intensive week, the first lecture, which was like so dramatic. So then I realised that hey, I don't need to be the same kind of a teacher as the teachers I have had. That there is no such – this probably sounds like that ok, of course it is so, but it must be realised somehow. That you can be just like you are as a teacher and that's just fine. And in a way you don't have to adopt some kind of a stereotypical teacher role and start forcing your authority the first thing when you enter a classroom. Instead you can proceed like by interaction. It was so liberating.

In her narrative Aino again reinforces the realisation of being oneself and acting through interaction as a meaningful and liberating transition point in her thinking as a teacher. She distances herself from the stereotypic social representation of her own teachers as distant, authoritative ('forcing your authority') characters (Wortham 2001). Aino's insight of 'you can be just like you are as a teacher and that's just fine' expresses voiced alignment between the personal and professional sense of self (ArvaJa 2016). Her comment 'it must be realised somehow' shows that the ideas presented in teacher education are not taken as given but become adopted as your own voice (Bakhtin 1981) through the process of critical reflection and transformative awareness (Korthagen 2004; Cunliffe 2016; Cranton 2016).

The students also feel they have gained some concrete interaction competencies in the SIC course. Aapo states how the course has provided concrete resources for interaction and encountering pupils in the school context and also enhanced his interaction skills:

Aapo : As foremost, it has brought sort of courage to engage in the interaction situations in the school environment. It has also given directly certain tools as to how to take contact with pupils. [...] It has given courage to all kinds of interaction. As on the other hand, we learnt there also quite general interaction skills. [...] In that sense I feel that I'm now a better discussant, interactor and communicator after that course.

After the course, Aapo characterises himself as having better interactional competencies. Also for Elisa, the SIC course is meaningful in positioning herself as an interactive and caring teacher and in providing her with concrete resources for being and acting as such a teacher (Gee 2000; Wortham 2001):

Elisa : For me, what I have gained most now from this course in particular, is perhaps such a point that as I wish to be a different and good teacher especially in terms of interaction. And I want to be a caring and good teacher. But most importantly, I have gained a number of practical tools, which can be used just in the classroom and in a group. Because merely the fact that I want to be something does not mean that I'm capable for it without any competencies.

Overall, according to the students, the SIC course supports in seeing the importance of interpersonal connection in teacher's work and, thus, enhance characterising and positioning themselves as interactive, caring teachers (Wortham 2001). The course also provides concrete tools and means for pupil-teacher interaction and develops their interaction skills, thus, providing them also resources to act according to their characterisations in the future work as a teacher.

### ***Past school experiences in negotiating personal teacher characterisations***

One essential element in the students' teacher characterisations is their critical reflection (Cranton 2016) and evaluation (Wortham 2001) of their past experiences on school, teachers and teaching. The students commonly characterise their future selves as being educators and having a caring and good relationship with the pupils. This characterisation resonates with their own ideals and with the ideas and ideologies (i.e. voice) of the pedagogical studies as the previous examples demonstrate. This characterisation is further reinforced in the students' narratives in evaluating their own past school experiences. In the next example, Olli uses the characteristics of good teachers as voices to be identified with:

Olli : I'd say a common denominator for all good teachers I have had is that they have been genuinely what they are there in the classroom. They have not mirrored or tried to be anything they are not. Children are really quick to notice and see through the fake if you try to be something else than what you really are and they can sense it and there will be no trust that way. As regards what kind of teachers have been good, so I'd say such teachers who have in a way trusted that the pupils will do [their part]. Then they have interaction skills and a good sense of humour and they have somehow been able to inspire pupils into learning. As for such culture of ruling by fear, so I never liked those classes, it didn't advance at least my learning in any way. [...] In my opinion, it is of primary importance that there's no such atmosphere of fear there: "If I answer wrong, so everybody will laugh at me".

As in an earlier example Olli again reinforces the uniqueness and being oneself as important teacher characteristics enhancing the creation of trust between the pupils and the teacher. Also interaction skills, good sense of humour and an inspiring approach are the characteristics to be pursued. Olli differentiates himself from 'the culture of ruling by fear' which he relates to another voice from the past. This culture of ruling by fear, which seems to reflect a social representation of a teacher type (Martikainen 2019) shared in the students' past school history, is also evident in Aino's narrative:

Aino : I can recall one class and there were several points to be answered. Then the teacher stated that Aino, all wrong. Now it feels amusing. Then it was quite [awful]. Teachers may be unaware of that, especially a subject teacher having this one class with this group once a day

perhaps, what you say and do there so it can remain living like that. The situations you deal with there in the class, and even though they appear quite neutral from your point of view, so that although somebody answered wrong, it's not a big deal, but it might be that the class community keeps reminding about it so that it stays in the interaction also further. For this reason, it's important as to how I can go easiest through this homework. It has been really important indeed that in my class you don't need to be afraid.

Aino builds her voice as a kind and sensitive teacher through differentiating herself from (Wortham 2001) her own 'bad teachers' and related bad experiences. Aino's school history and own lived experiences at school are very significant in her voicing as a sensitive and caring teacher. Aino had been bullied when she was a pupil and she feels that the teachers did not intervene:

Aino : This [teacher] training year has been personally really challenging for me. Because after the first practice session I was thinking that how I'm going voluntary there [the school for teaching practice], which has given me a lot of bad experiences and I'm here in the school world again, so why on earth? [...] During this year I became aware that I had known I was annoyed with those classmates of mine and their ways to treat others. I was not the only one in that class. [...] And I was aware that I was annoyed with my teachers as well because they didn't do anything at all to the situation. Then I thought that I would never wish to be such a teacher who just ignores these things. Now I have noticed that I am really sensitive to perceive there in the class if there are some tensions. Like at once I start figuring out how the interaction and dynamics of the class are working. Then I also come across with such pupils who have made me think that hey, this one is just like me. [...] Or you recall that some pupil's behaviour reminds you about that of one of your classmates.

During the pedagogical studies, Aino becomes aware of her anger related to her bullying experiences in the past and she uses these personal experiences as a resource in creating her own voice as a caring and sensitive teacher. Aino hybridises space-times of diverse lives by sharing the emotional experience (Leander 2001). In other words, Aino uses past events as an evaluative frame in interpreting similar events as a pre-service teacher. Aino juxtaposes alternative frames of (inter)acting and chooses the one that feels personally and morally 'right' to her own repertoire (Wortham 2001). For Aino's teacher orientation, her reflection concerning this (bullying) experience can be seen as a turning point with significant influence on her teacher characteristics and identity. It can be said that Aino is involved in a process of authenticity, transforming her (teacher) self through critical reflection and new awareness of self, others and contexts (Cranton 2016; Cranton and Carusetta 2004).

In his characterisation, in turn, Aapo juxtaposes the ideal teacher characteristics and experiences of his 'own schooldays':

Aapo : Well, the atmosphere should absolutely be such that pupils dare to come and take contact with teachers. Just about issues not related to teaching, then, absolutely. If they have some worries and concerns these, too, may be told to the teacher. Getting this somehow across to the pupils, so it would be quite important. For example, I don't feel that in my own schooldays I would have found it natural by any means that I would have gone and told my personal matters to a teacher. [...] Somehow a kind of openness would be the main thing I would expect as regards the relationships between teachers and

pupils. [...] The teacher would specifically be like a reliable adult. Specifically the teacher's role as an educator would be visible, as to the kind of relationship to pupils.

The teacher as an educator and an adult having sympathetic contact with the pupils are the characteristics of an ideal teacher that Aapo identifies himself with (Wortham 2001). In doing this, Aapo contrasts the traditional pedagogy of his own school days with that of a current pedagogy, which presumes a different pupil-teacher relationship. The 'old setting' is constituted by authoritarian social relations and distinct teacher-pupil identities, where personal matters are not relevant topics of teacher-pupil discussions. In contrast, teacher as a reliable, approachable adult, whom the pupils can trust also in personal matters, is what Aapo values and pursues. As Aapo narrates, to succeed as an educator, one must be able to establish a personal relationship to pupils and narrow the power and emotional distance between the teacher and the pupils.

Also the voices (Wortham 2001) of one's own 'good teachers' are relevant to the students' teacher characterisations, as Lauri's narrative demonstrates:

Lauri : The PE teacher was inspiring and like encouraging and he threw some jokes there and tried to get everybody along, so I surely remember him as a good type. What I myself have tried to achieve in my own teaching, a kind of atmosphere, like a relaxed and encouraging atmosphere. [...] So that he [PE teacher] faced a pupil and sought interaction and tried to get the class come along to those activities. [...] Then again, as for what kind of a teacher I'd like to be: Just a kind of encouraging, I guess, inspiring and could bring some interaction to the class.

In the above narrative, Lauri describes the characteristics of his old physical education teacher, with such attributes as inspiring, encouraging, joking, relaxed and interactive. This teacher represents an ideal teacher type based on Lauri's own school experiences. Lauri identifies himself with the characteristics of this old PE teacher that can be seen as a significant other in Lauri's sense making as a teacher (Wortham 2001). Also Elisa's characterisation as a prospective teacher resonates with the voice of some past teachers:

Elisa : Surprisingly enough, I loved history. Mostly because of the teacher, who had a good relationship with the pupils. Always the kind of teachers who manage to create such a close contact, so that the teacher is not a distant character there in the front, so such teachers are always easy to remember. [...] Perhaps just the kind who manage to create such a relationship, and I wish to be like that myself as well.

For Elisa and Lauri, the characteristics of past good teachers are significant, and they want to turn them into their own voice. In Elisa's narrative, this kind of teacher characteristic ('manage to create such a close contact') is differentiated from a 'distant character' assuming neutrality and objectivity in the relationship (Wortham 2001).

Above examples demonstrate how in voicing their characteristics as prospective teachers the students evaluate (Wortham 2001) and reflect on (Dyke 2009; Korthagen 2004) their earlier experiences related to their own school teachers and their characteristics and practices. An ideal teacher type the students continuously appreciate and identify themselves with is a teacher characterised as an educator being emotionally present and having a close, trusting and good relationship with the pupils. In contrast, the

students differentiate themselves from a teacher type characterised as an emotionally distant authoritarian character.

## Discussion and conclusions

This study explored how five pre-service subject teachers characterised themselves as prospective teachers after completing their year-long pedagogical studies. The study showed how lived experiences and ideas stemming from the teacher education, earlier school experiences including different social representations of teachers (Martikainen 2019), as well as one's own personal values were negotiated in positioning oneself as a teacher of certain kind (Gee 2000; Wortham 2001). Thus, by switching from one voice to another, the students moved across multiple experiences that provided resources for their sense-making as a teacher (Leander 2001). The results are in line with the earlier studies indicating how teacher identity is negotiated in an intertwined relationship of the past, the present and the future (e.g. Flores and Day 2006; Lee and Schallert 2016), and in active reflection and interpretation between the person and the social and cultural context (Kayi-Aydar and Miller 2018; Vähäsantanen 2015; Wortham 2001).

The students shared a social representation of a past teacher with characteristics of wide power and emotional distance between pupils and the teacher. A similar formal and authoritarian teacher type was found in Martikainen's (2019) study on students' social representations of teachers. The students consciously differentiated themselves (Wortham 2001) from this kind of teacher character, and rather characterised themselves as interactive and caring educators with close and good relationship with their pupils. This involved identifying with their own ideal teachers, personal values as well as ideologies and ideas in the pedagogical studies. In Martikainen's (2019) study, a similar teacher type of friendly and communicative teacher was evident in both teachers' and students' social representations of teachers. Our results indicate that being and becoming aware of different (historical) voices behind teachership is important for teachers' professional development. Engaging pre-service subject teachers in critical dialogue and reflection (Dyke 2009; Korthagen 2004) helps them avoid static and habitual categorisations and social representations of 'the teacher' and become authors of their professional identity rather than followers of an authoritative word (Bakhtin 1981).

Critical reflection on one's past experiences regarding, for example, the characteristics and practices of their own school teachers, connected with new perspectives stemming from the teacher education, enabled the students' internally persuasive discourse, i.e. testing alternative perspectives (Matusov 2007). Consequently, their pedagogical studies and the ideas presented and encountered therein, challenged some previous conceptions and assumptions and led to new awareness, meanings and understandings (Lee and Schallert 2016) that transformed the students' thinking about teaching (Cunliffe 2016; Cranton 2016). This gave them possibilities to negotiate teacher characteristics more in line with one's personal sense of self (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Arvaja 2016) and own core qualities and values, and also to explicate one's own mission as a teacher (Korthagen 2004).

From the pedagogical studies, especially the course Social Interaction and Cooperation seemed to provide the students with meaningful learning experiences (Kostiainen et al. 2018). In line with the findings of Kostiainen et al. (2018), the course design contributed to the students' positioning as interactive and caring teachers. Interaction in itself, the actual



phenomenon explored in the course, was studied collaboratively and interactively. The students were able to link their practical experiences to the theoretical phenomenon, and reflect on their personal experiences. Based on their own accounts, they were also able to tacitly and explicitly learn interaction skills in the course. The student narratives evidenced about their strong emotions and experiences related to the course, such as Aino's awakening and liberating moments, which can be considered a characteristic of meaningful learning experiences (Kostiainen et al. 2018). These findings demonstrate well how teacher education can support student teachers in developing necessary teaching competencies (such as interaction skills) in line with who they are and what motivates them to become a teacher, and hence to overcome the dichotomy between 'developing competencies versus personal growth' (Meijer, Korthagen, and Vasalos 2009, 298).

Our narrative analysis of the interview data, as such, leaned on students' retrospective accounts rather than on their actual (learning) activities as a pre-service teacher. However, despite this limitation, interview is a useful tool for capturing the negotiation of teacher characterisations as an interplay of the narrated self and other characters appearing within the utterances of the multivoiced self (Aveling, Gillespie, and Cornish 2015; Wortham 2001). According to the dialogical approach to narrative self-construction, if the same characterisation (voicing) and positioning are repeated on many occasions, it indicates that the narrator wants to reinforce a particular sense of self (Wortham 2001). In our data, a certain preferred teacher type with related features occurred repeatedly in the students' characterisations. This teacher type or social representation of a teacher echoing the voice of current pedagogy and suppressing the voice of the more traditional and authoritative pedagogy was, therefore, collectively reinforced in the student interviews (See also Arvaja and Sarja 2020). However, in order to capture the full complexity of prospective teachers' construction and conception of teachership, future studies could look more closely at how the professional sense of self is negotiated both in the dialogical relationships in the students' learning activities in teacher education (including practice schools) and in the students' self-narrative embedded in the socio-cultural conditions (Akkerman and Meijer 2011). Furthermore, attention should be paid to how the characteristics negotiated during teacher education are lived through and (re)negotiated when the students enter the world of work and take on the teaching profession in practice. Previous studies have shown that the school world and its overt and covert structures and routines tend to support and maintain traditional approaches (Räihä et al. 2011). This often leads beginning teachers to suppress their own voices, while adapting themselves to the prevailing culture within the school community and its discursive practices.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

*Maarit Arvaja* is a senior researcher at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä. She is an adjunct professor in the field of collaborative learning and interaction in learning environments. Her current research focuses on teacher identity, higher education pedagogy, and dialogical and narrative approaches to learning.

**Anneli Sarja** is a senior researcher at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä. She is an adjunct professor in the field of community learning. Her major research interests are in the comparative research and especially in the transformative nature of professionals' work.

**Paula Rönnerberg** is a university teacher at the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä. Her current teaching includes class teacher and subject teacher education, school assessment, social interaction and teacher training.

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