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Becoming a history teacher: observations on the beliefs and growth of student teachers

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Abstract

This article reports on history student teachers' development and their beliefs about teaching and good teachers. The data consist of several essays of 18 respondents written during their education, and interviews with five students. Most respondents had become interested in the subject very early, and independently of formal school education. Models adopted during early school years, however, did influence their attitudes towards teaching and teacher's role. Typically the student teachers' concentration was self-centred or focused on their own classroom behaviour. They tended to overestimate lesson content and resorted to content expertise and minute lesson plans as a reaction to teaching problems. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Multiple layers of subject-specific teachers' socialisation

Becoming a teacher is a multifaceted process that can be interpreted, for example, as learning to teach, as personal development, or as teacher socialisation. During their development, teachers create their expertise, competence and practical knowledge, which to a great extent is implicit and experiential. Becoming a teacher is not only a personal process, but is interactive and situated in certain contexts, and for a subject-specific teacher this process seems to include a great number of ingredients:

- early influences of childhood and school years (formation of beliefs about teaching, learning, students, and school subjects),
- attachment to the subject,
- socialisation into the academic subculture of the university department,
- development as a subject specialist,
- socialisation as a teacher in teacher education and in work settings.

In secondary schools, the subjects represent an essential framework in the formation of teacher identities and school culture, and remain central in all phases of teachers' careers (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995). It is typical of secondary school teachers' careers that the choice of subject area precedes the decision to become a teacher (Little, 1990; John, 1996). How prospective teachers find their passion and motivation for the subject areas

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thus forms a critical phase in their careers. Despite the significance of this approach, there is not much research on the career choice or subject specific predisposition of subject teachers.

There is a rich literature showing the importance of the early school experiences and the beliefs of student teachers at the beginning of their studies as the basis of their development as teachers (Lortie, 1975; Calderhead, 1991; John, 1996; Sugrue, 1997; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). During this apprenticeship of observation, teachers-to-be collect impressions and tacit knowledge about their future profession. During lessons they not only learn history or biology, but also receive a rich store of experiences of differing types of teachers, differing styles of teaching, and various ways of studying.

Subjects have been characterised as subcultures with their own epistemologies, values, traditions and practices (Lacey, 1977; Ball & Goodson, 1985; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Also socialisation into the subject teacher's role and into the subject subculture may begin during the apprenticeship of observation. Student teachers may have adopted during their school careers beliefs about the nature of various subjects, their status in the school curriculum, and their appropriate teaching methods. The cycle continues at the university, where they learn to be subject specialists and adopt the models of reasoning and thinking typical of the field, although, in a single domain, the subject tradition may not be totally coherent (cf. Quinlan, 1999). Seminal for teacher education is whether there are major discrepancies between the subject cultures of the school and academy, and the goals and values of teacher education.

Prior beliefs or implicit theories may be negative or positive, but they are generally highly stable. After Lortie (1975), several authors have on one hand emphasised that student teachers' preconceptions have a stronger influence on their socialisation as teachers than formal teacher education, but suggested on the other hand, that this should not be seen as a taken-for-granted and deterministic phenomenon (cf. Nettle, 1998; Wideen et al., 1998). Beliefs that are held particularly strongly may furthermore function as a source of conservatism in schools and as friction in teacher

education, because the entrants to teacher education have often been good students in traditional schools and successful in teacher-driven instruction, and therefore unwilling to change their beliefs (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Slekár, 1998; Fehn & Koeppen, 1998).

Furthermore, student teachers often have highly idealistic conceptions of children's motivation and capacity for learning, and of their own ability to manage the classroom settings. This idealism comes to a test in the student teachers' own first classroom experiences as teachers, when the novices have to "survive in the jungle" (White, 1989). At the beginning of their programme, student teachers very often are bewildered, due to the tension between their own expectations and their actual experiences. What is also typical of students at the onset of the teacher education programme is their tendency to emphasise the personal and affective nature of their experiences of teaching (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Day, 1999).

The implicit theories, whether conservative or idealistic, can be seen as a challenge for teacher education, as without a fundamental restructuring, these deeply rooted conceptions may become a hindrance for the prospective teachers' further development. Literature on teacher education frequently recommends that students be given possibilities to become conscious of and analyse their beliefs, and also acquire models of realistic alternatives for teaching and for themselves as teachers (e.g. Hollingsworth, 1989; Kagan, 1992; Cole & Knowles, 1993). The present study is based on a one-year teacher education course for history teachers, where the author, as the lecturer responsible for the subject method course, wanted to assign the students tasks in which they were to express their prior beliefs and also their experiences of becoming a history teacher.

2. Description of the study

This article reports on a study of preservice history teachers' development, their motivation for studying history, and their beliefs about teaching, and also explores how they describe and evaluate

their experience in the beginning of preservice education. The teacher education programme for subject teachers in Finland normally lasts one academic year, which can be considered an extremely short period for teacher development. One of the goals of this study was thus to follow up intensively the experiences and conceptions that the students have during the first half of this programme. The study was carried out in the department of teacher education, and it draws on a larger project investigating the growth and beliefs of prospective subject teachers in three subject areas (Finnish language, biology/geography, and history).

This study deals with the sub-data of history student teachers. The data consist of several assignments written by a group of 18 student teachers during one semester. Nine of them were males, and nine females, from 22 to 32 years of age. All had studied history for at least three years in university. Three of them entered the teacher education programme after finishing the MA degree, the others had not yet completed their degrees and were incorporating the pedagogical studies into their degree.

In the first few days of their teacher education course all the students wrote essays on the following themes:

- How did I become interested in history?
- Images of good and bad teachers from my school years,
- The teacher I want to become.

All students submitted several other essays they had written during the course to their portfolios, describing their first teaching experiences during teaching practice and their observations on teacher–pupil relations. Additionally, I refer to the semi-structured interviews of five students selected from the group of 18 on a voluntary basis, conducted twice during the year. In the interview, the students were asked to answer questions in which they had to express their ideas about teaching, learning, and teacher's role, and evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses as teachers. The interviews were conducted by a research assistant, who had been educated as a history

teacher. The present study is mainly based on the written data, while the interviews had only a complementary function.

All the data, except the interviews, were created in natural surroundings, as an integral part of the teacher education course, and the essays analysed in this study thus had the purpose of promoting the students' reflective processes and of making them conscious of their beliefs. Although the essays analysed here were part of coursework, they can be regarded as relevant sources of student teacher thinking, and also as flexible and natural methods of bringing the whole group of 18 students to reflect intensively, on repeated occasions, on the issues related to teacher development and identity. There is, of course, the risk of getting pedagogically correct responses that do not correspond to the students' real attitudes or their action, which must be taken into account in the interpretation of the data.

The analysis of the essays and the interviews was qualitative, laying stress on the common patterns and recurring themes expressed by the students. Each set of essays was analysed separately. The data were open-ended responses to the essay topics, and included a number of variations; a single response often included a number of viewpoints related to the research question. Thus it was necessary to combine similar shades of meaning, when identifying the patterns, irrespective of the dissimilarity of formulation. The interview data of the five students were used as complementation or corroboration for the observations on the essays, but in some cases the data included interesting contradictions with the essays, as some of the interviewees were rather outspoken in their expressions.

3. Findings

3.1. *How I found my motivation for history*

The essays analysed for this study indicate that for most of these student teachers history was a domain that they had found very early and independently from formal school education. However, the decision to become a teacher was a

recent one, and this choice had often been less obvious than the subject itself. Half of the respondents said that their interest in history had been awakened in childhood, and typically of children, they had been attracted by mythical, adventurous and dramatic historical events. Most of those who had taken the bait early were male students. An extreme example is represented in the next quotation:

I became interested in the past before I even learned to read. What I now, 25 years later, have in my mind of those times are adventure stories described in illustrated books, pictures in them, films, and treasure hunting....I gather that I learned to read in order to get more information about these events. Consequently, the domain of history formed a clear target for me even before history lessons in the primary school. In the comprehensive and upper secondary school I was not so interested in other subjects.

The students' own desire to read and acquire information was essential in their pursuit of history (13 out of 18 mentioned this). Surprisingly, many student teachers mentioned either their parents' interest in history or their history-related professions or academic backgrounds, and also travels with their parents and visits to museums.

History teaching at school did not clearly seem to have influenced these prospective teachers' decisions to study history or to become history teachers, and the data included mixed messages in this respect. For many respondents, history teaching had been an inspiring and thought-provoking experience, and several students said that they had had excellent history teachers at least in some phases. They were most satisfied with history teaching in the upper secondary level, which established interest in the background of the modern world. History, in the last school years, was seen as a challenge for one's own thinking, and the function of the history teacher should consequently be to provoke thought. In one of the essays, the history teacher was seen as a professional role model.

However, remarkably many of the respondents were critical of their schools. For a student

interested in history since the early years, history teaching at school, normally from the age of 11 on, may have been a disappointment:

Not to be too blunt, I became interested (and kept my interest alive) in spite of school until the last years of the upper secondary. ...I had great expectations of school history, but when it finally started in the fifth grade, I was disappointed, because it proceeded slowly and I knew almost everything that was being taught. Up till the second year of the upper secondary school I was a very passive student indeed and was really frustrated by history teaching. When I got a new history teacher, I began to get interested again thanks to his conversational method of teaching. I was really interested in history all the time and read the textbooks in advance as soon I got them, but in the lessons I was in hibernation and busy with my own things.

There were several comments of this kind, and criticism was not limited to the primary school. However, these students chose to be educated as history teachers themselves, because the school did not totally wither their enthusiasm, although it did not have much to offer. These findings are in accordance with those of John (1996), who has analysed the interviews of 42 prospective history teachers and explored their implicit theories of learning and teaching history. He asked them how they had originally become interested in history, and as in the present study, it had more often been despite the school than because of it—families, travels, museums and historical stories had been more important. Similar results were reported also by von Borries (1988), who studied how professional historians became interested in history.

The present study concentrated on the origins of the passion for history, but some respondents reflected thoroughly on the significance of history for the understanding of the present, and for them, history was mainly a cognitive and intellectual challenge. This level of historical understanding was formed during long years of studying history, but childhood excitement had often been the very first step in the ladders.

The 18 prospective history teachers in the present study also included a few persons who had somehow drifted to the study of history, and were without any special commitment to it. Two of them said that they had been generally oriented to the humanities, disliked mathematics, and had no talent for languages—so history was what was left.

What is common, when comparing these students with the two other groups, first language (Finnish), and biology/geography, analysed in the largest project, is that most students got the “spark” for their major subjects at an early stage. The first language and biology/geography student teachers also emphasised the role models of their parents and childhood experiences, and reported that school had not been equally important. Some of these respondents had also been very satisfied with their own teachers of respective subjects. The history group differed most in the frequency of explicit criticism of their own history teachers.

For most of these 18 history student teachers in the present study, the choice of subject studies had preceded the choice of teaching career, and they also seemed to have a stronger commitment to the subject than to teaching. In the first interview of five students, after three months of teacher education, only two of them said that they would certainly and primarily become teachers; for the others, teaching had been more or less a way to guarantee employment. This attitude was articulated strongly by a male student:

It was history I wanted to study in the university, and teacher education was the only opportunity to get a job, a specific occupation as a history graduate.

3.2. *Good and bad teacher models from the school years*

Student teachers have during the school time seen numerous teachers and a plethora of different teaching styles, which naturally has shaped their ideas about teaching and the teacher’s role. A powerful, maybe a bit exaggerated example of this continuum is the description written by one of the

respondents on the first day of the teacher education programme:

There was a teacher who was an absolute authority for me, he kept his classes silent and interested during the whole lesson. He transmitted his knowledge and his life experience to us behind his noble authority, and will certainly remain in the minds of all his students for the rest of our lives.

The image this student had of a good teacher, in this case of a history teacher, bound his conceptions of teaching and he was not willing to revise them during the teacher education course. In the interview, he said that he desperately missed the Herbartian method of teaching, because those principles had guided the teaching that he had received. There were quite a number of similar expressions of student conservatism, although the models of good teaching were not quite so teacher-centred in the full set of data.

The written responses in which the student teachers described good and poor teacher types were analysed in order to find the recurrent characteristics they attributed to their teachers. According to the data, a good teacher made the students think critically, had an enormous capital of information, and was willing to discuss and able to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom. The teacher had to be an expert, charismatic, flexible and just. In the descriptions of good teachers, the student teachers emphasised that the teacher had to be a strong personality—he or she might be a creative eccentric, but would also be demanding, efficient and precise. In order to stimulate student enthusiasm, the teacher did not need to use modern teaching methods; one of the history students praised his dynamic upper secondary school history teacher, but reminded that “in these days his methodology would certainly be out of date”.

Students accepted the old-fashioned methods of their good teachers, and even praised them. A minor contradiction can be traced in their views, as bad teachers were blamed for inefficient and boring methodologies and inappropriate use of technology. Poor teachers had insufficient skills of communication and classroom management. They

bullied pupils with transparencies and lacked a sense of humour, hated pupils and hated work. Teachers who were too severe or indifferent were also included in this gallery of rogues.

On the basis of the data, it seems that these student teachers did not have a strong schema for student-centred teaching, but, instead, many of them were reluctant to see it as a realistic alternative to their old models. Angell (1998) reported on the development of two social studies student teachers along the same lines; one of them resisted new ideas of teaching on the basis of the transmission orientation of the school years, but the other was open to the student-centred constructivist view of teaching. Similarly, John (1996) reports that the students in his study described good teachers mainly on the basis of their personal characteristics, and bad teachers on the basis of the poor quality of their teaching skills. Student teachers in his study had simplistic and straightforward conceptions of teaching and learning. As observing apprentices, they had seen teaching through students' eyes, and thus, in their impression, teaching seemed to be a spontaneous performance.

3.3. *The teacher I would like to be*

One of the questions the respondents had to ponder was about the goals they set for their own development (the teacher I want to become). The findings can be related to their images of good teachers. Also, the student teachers themselves wanted to be liked and respected by their pupils. The most common answer (in 12 papers out of 18) was that they wanted to be able to awaken student enthusiasm. There were also other related expressions: the ability to deliver pleasant and enjoyable lessons, having imagination, and being popular among pupils. About half of the respondents noted the necessity of knowing and understanding their students, paying attention to their needs and establishing a good relationship with them. Only one of the 18 student teachers mentioned expertise in the content area, which may have been taken for granted by the others. About one third wanted to become teachers who made their students think and understand the world, and almost as many

described their future ideals as teachers capable of developing themselves. Scant remarks were made about fairness, plausibility and self-confidence. A few respondents emphasised that they would like to be instrumental in promoting their students' learning:

I would like to be a teacher to whose classes the students would like to come. I would like to spark my students' interest in history and make them think with their own brains, instead of delivering them a pre-digested package of factual knowledge that they have to learn by heart. ...I think this kind of a learning situation is more fruitful also for the teacher, for it can enhance my interaction with the students. Of course it will be very demanding for me, because I have to try to change in accordance with the needs of my students.

I would like to become a teacher who can make my students interested in history, and excited by it. In that respect I should myself have enthusiasm for my subject and have lots of imagination, because the lessons must not always be of the same kind (where the teacher speaks and students sleep as in my school).

In the latter quotation, the respondent was critical of the teaching she received, which might be a symptom of conceptual change. However, it may only represent the early idealism typical of many students beginning their teacher education programme. To be cynical, it might be purely lip-service and an example of the tendency to express pedagogically correct ideas (cf. von Wright, 1997).

3.4. *Summary of entering beliefs*

At the onset of the teacher education programme, the history students were mainly orientated to the substance of history. This was the area that they wanted to be specialists in, and almost all of them had very little or no experience of work with children. Interestingly, the data indicated that the respondents had found little inspiration in history teaching in the school years, notwithstanding their own interest in history. Methodologies seem to have been irrelevant in the early

reflections, but especially when describing good images of teaching, they tended to underline teacher personality. Emotional elements were the most important when they described the ideals of their own professional development.

The impressions described in the previous sections were written down in the very first days of the teacher education programme, and they were rather idealistic and diffuse, partly based on experience, partly on pedagogical literature and benevolent common sense. This idealism was put to test during teaching practice when the student teachers had their own first lessons in front of real classes.

3.5. *Novices in the jungle*

After about four weeks teaching practice, the respondents submitted essays about the observations of their own lessons and those of their peers, with special reference to student–teacher interaction. In addition to essays, these themes were also discussed in the interviews. The data indicated that the student teachers were highly sensitive to the reactions of their audience. The majority were disappointed with their first teaching experience, and the data contained frequent mentions of difficulties related to teaching, lack of natural interaction with the students, and class management problems. Many of the prospective history teachers revised and reduced their idealistic goals, as they found out that it was not easy to spark enthusiasm or thought processes in the minds of reluctant adolescents. They gave several, overlapping explanations for their failure:

- overloading the factual content,
- the tendency, typical of beginners, to concentrate too much on oneself and one's own performance,
- overestimation of students' learning motivation,
- uncertainty about student reactions in classroom settings,
- bad relationships between the students in the class,
- problems in establishing contacts with the class.

The respondents wrote that it was their most common mistake to transmit content that was too difficult for the students. This attitude in some cases led to the underestimation of students' capacity, and to oversimplified content and procedures.

Of my own teaching experience I have learnt that I have to throw away the all too exaggerated objectives I had for my instruction. In the secondary level, it is enough to present a skeleton for the content. You may flesh out the skeleton only if the class is highly motivated for history.

The student teachers' own subject background obviously explains the emphasis laid on lesson contents. They had, during the last few years, concentrated themselves on university level studies in history, and consequently they now planned their lessons with emphasis on the correctness and thoroughness of the factual content, as if they had been preparing for an academic seminar, without attention to the transformation of the content into teaching.

Whether you are in your twenties or thirties, a few years in the university change the student teacher: it is in any case very difficult to understand the thinking of adolescents in the secondary school.

Beginning teachers are typically very concerned about students' reactions, sometimes even afraid of them. This often created a major hindrance for proper interaction, as is described by the following essay quotation:

Creating interaction is particularly hard if you are not self-confident. When I had my first lesson, I did not know what to expect. I was really reserved—would the pupils eat me alive or not—I only concentrated on how to deliver the lesson in an honest manner. Direct interaction with the class was not the first thing to come to my mind...

Quite a few of the respondents described the encouraging and constructive feedback which they had received from their supervisors in the university training school. However, some student

teachers revealed their uncertainty, which was intensified in front of the classes. A female student had the feeling that her own learning process was still in the beginning, and she was wanting self-assurance:

Somehow I think that I have in principle only learnt what I should not do as a teacher, but not yet how to avoid making the mistakes.

Another prospective teacher compared her attitudes to those of a teenager:

Giving a lesson was a sweaty experience, and after getting through it somehow I always sighed with relief and escaped.

There were also examples of very conscious and detailed reflection by the student teachers on their own action. A male student teacher described how his teaching style gradually changed from self-centred to student oriented, and how he fairly quickly learnt to pay attention to the pupils. He described his development as a set of concentric circles, with himself in the centre, first paying attention to a few active students, then to the average students, to the quiet students in the outer range, and finally to the world outside of the classroom. The same respondent claimed that his professional development had been a sudden and easy process.

The analysis of student teacher experience indicates, in accordance with previous research (e.g. McNally, Cope, Inglis, & Stronach, 1994, 1997), the importance of student reactions in the socialisation of novice teachers. The interactions they are able to create with the classes, how the pupils accept them and co-operate with them, are interpreted as highly important signals of their aptitude for the teaching career. Concentrating on one's own survival is a problem typical of novices, as well as disillusionment and pessimism due to weak student motivation and classroom management (cf. Kagan, 1992; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Wideen et al., 1998). The experiences and conceptions described by the respondents are compatible with White's (1989) metaphor of teaching practice as a rite of transition. At the beginning of their programme the student teachers felt they were

staggering between chaos and order, looking for survival strategies in the jungle.

3.6. Survival strategies

The history student teachers in the present study considered that their most serious problems were related to interaction and classroom management, but in order to manage better in this respect they tried to plan their lessons more carefully, both related to content and procedures. Thus they attempted to be convincing and win the students' appreciation as experts. A female student teacher wrote that she had tried to find shelter behind strictly factual instruction and tried to avoid noticing the class at all. A male student wrote

A novice teacher in particular may compensate for a lack of experience by planning the lessons carefully. In my experience, the pupils do know instinctively if the teacher has enthusiasm for the content, and if you distribute the content in the right way and ask the right questions, the pupils also become interested.

Typically of novice behaviour, the student teachers often rather mechanically followed the lines they had fixed in their plans. In planning the steps of content transmission, they tended to stick to their strength, subject matter background. As novices in teaching and classroom management, they could feel like experts in the content area (Sikes, 1985). Also Koeppen (1998) found that student teachers tended to emphasise detailed lesson planning in order to achieve a sense of security and in order to guarantee better success in the classrooms.

There were also opposite views and criticism of this strategy. Some of the respondents actually saw that it was a mistake to make plans that were too precise and to take them too literally, as they found that it very often prevented them from being flexible in their interaction with their students.

Another model for survival with difficult classes was to readopt the prior conservatism, and after the first hard experiences, it was an easy solution for many student teachers to return to the styles and methods of teaching they had observed in their own schools as students (Cole & Knowles,

1993; Eisenhart, Behm, & Romagnano, 1991). Within this group of history student teachers there were surprisingly many who disliked the student-centred methodologies that were preferred both in the methods course in the department of teacher education, and in the practice in the teacher training school. This was expressed in both the essays and the interviews.

The prospective history teachers in the present study wanted to emphasise the content on one hand, and practical advice and guidance on teaching methods and class management on the other. In spite of the importance of interaction expressed in their first essays, some of the respondents were highly content-oriented. A male student teacher revealed in the interview conducted after three months of teacher education that he had not yet quite adopted the teacher's interactive and educational role:

The point is that you teach the subject in which you yourself are educated, in the secondary level, and then of course there is your pedagogical role, in principle....

In accordance with these conservative views on teaching, some students indicated their resistance to theory; one of them said in interview that he did not need any theoretical basis for his teaching. Some students equated teaching and performance:

What is important is to achieve more self-confidence in my performance—and that is not something you can *learn*.

The quotation seems to imply that you cannot teach how to teach, but the skills appear somewhere.

During the course of the first semester, new tones gradually emerged beside feelings of uncertainty, indicating that not all the student teachers were struggling with the distress, chaos and uncertainty of beginning teaching. For instance, in the interviews conducted in the late autumn, some students described that it had been very easy to learn to teach, as in this comment:

What I have learnt is that it is not as difficult as some people like to think. You can do it very well after a short period of training. At least I

feel that it is possible to manage the routines very easily.

In some descriptions it is possible to observe signs of conceptual change, and some student teachers did lay stress on the necessity of changing their own frame of reference, noting that they knew the role of a student, but should adopt the teacher's way of thinking:

If you don't act as an adult, you cannot be a teacher. After 17 years on one side of the teacher's desk, you have to move to the other side.

This had been very confusing to the interviewee in the beginning. Another new element in their thinking was that they had begun to see the world through the teacher's eyes, trying to filter subject knowledge into teaching and pedagogical knowledge:

I think that the development of my pedagogical world view has started. I cannot even watch the TV without thinking how to use the programme when teaching history or social studies, or when I read newspapers I wonder whether I should clip the item for later use.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study are fairly well in accordance with previous research on teacher education and teacher development during pre-service education. Evidently, the socialisation of subject-specific teachers to a great extent follows the same lines as that of teachers in general. However, some observations on subject-specific teacher education need more thorough discussion.

A significant finding is that many of the student teachers in this study had become interested in history very early and independently from formal history education at school (cf. John, 1996). However, there was also strong criticism towards history teaching at school, which leads to some pedagogical questions. Little has been written about the differentiation of history teaching. Since history, in a sense, is rather difficult and abstract for adolescents who often have limited previous information, teachers often try to make the

content of teaching easier and simpler. This kind of teaching easily results in the frustration of history enthusiasts, because it does not fulfil their cognitive or emotional expectations. However, these students form the very group from which prospective professional historians and history teachers will be recruited. What is the starting point for prospective history teachers, if they have been disillusioned and bored enthusiasts at school? What impact will this weak correspondence between personal interest and teaching have on the formation of their images of teaching? The model of the apprenticeship of observation seems to function as a source of contradictory messages, possibly supporting conservative or indifferent attitudes on teaching.

For the prospective history teachers in this study, the decision to become a teacher was a fairly recent one, and less obvious than the choice of the subject itself. Some of them also had a relatively weak commitment to teaching and teacher education. This orientation was stronger in the present data than in a study conducted two years earlier in the same department (Virta, Kaartinen, Eloranta, & Nieminen, 1998). However, the numbers of students willing to enter the history teacher education programmes have been high in most Finnish universities, and unlike most other subjects, it has not been difficult to recruit new students into history teacher education programmes. A probable explanation is that teaching is one of the few clearly defined professions for academic historians. Thus it is natural that every year there are some students who have chosen teacher education as a precaution, in order to find some use for their history studies, though they would prefer other academic work.

In spite of the limited impact the school reportedly had on the prospective teachers' interest in the subject, the models and beliefs adopted during early school years had obviously had a strong influence on their attitudes towards teaching and teacher's role. Although quite a few of the respondents were critical of the history teaching they had received, they, paradoxically, had rather conservative beliefs about teaching as teacher-driven distribution of factual content. This contradiction may indicate that the students during their

early school years had neither created frameworks for conceptualising teaching and learning, nor were ready to observe teaching as a work process. It was the personality, not the method that made a good teacher, hence teaching methodologies were seen as irrelevant.

Enthusiasm and charisma seemed to work as motivating factors in the processes of teaching, learning and teacher education. Frequently, it had been a passion found in childhood that had motivated the history students in the first place, and the role models that they had were typically strong and charismatic personalities. In their early assignments they expressed very idealistic goals for their own teaching, and wanted to be enthusiastic, encouraging and popular teachers. This idealism cannot be criticised as such, but it can become a burden for a student teacher who, encountering difficult groups and students with weak motivation, easily makes the observation that his or her own charisma is insufficient.

During the first few weeks of teacher training, however, the student teachers tended to concentrate on their own survival and feelings of uncertainty, and tended to create several models for survival. One of the strategies was to resort to familiar models of teaching. If a less difficult and a less ambitious strategy seemed to work it was easy to abandon the newer methodologies in the very beginning. Another survival strategy was to concentrate on the careful planning of content and delivery procedures and to seek refuge in their strong cognitive backgrounds. Although the essential challenge for their development was personal and pedagogical, they nevertheless tended to pay most attention to content formulation and transmission (cf. Koeppen, 1998). However, some of the students aimed at flexibility and real interaction in the classroom, and might even underline the easiness of the whole process in their reports. Emphasis on content, and the transmission orientation seem to be in conflict with the students' early intentions to be enthusiastic and constructive teachers. This may indicate typical novice behaviour and the beginning teachers' own insecurity and disillusionment, which made them revise their early idealistic perceptions of students and teaching. This behaviour may also be an

expression of the difficulties that the students had in co-ordinating the different models of teaching they had from their own early school years and from the teacher education programme. Evidently the student teachers had problems in adopting the student-centred principles that had been underlined in the methods seminar and in the training school, because of their own difficulties in the complicated classroom settings and the background of their prior beliefs.

The validity issues of the present study are related to the nature of the data. One of the aims of the study was to reach the student teachers' beliefs and experiences in as authentic a manner as possible, and the assignments used as part of the course work had no doubt a reasonable degree of ecological validity. However, as they were posed by the author in the role of the teacher responsible for the history teacher education programme, there is the risk that some of the respondents tried to express opinions that they believed to be "correct" or favourable. Reading through the essays dispersed these doubts to a great deal, although not totally. On the contrary, in the course of the programme, some male students were eager to articulate their opposition to the "correct" student-centred and constructivist ideas of history teaching. One factor increasing validity of the data is the triangulation carried out by complementing essay data with interviews that were conducted by another person.

The assignments were posed bona fide with the purpose of supporting the student teachers' reflective processes. The respondents did verbalise their reflections, and obviously also became more conscious of their prior beliefs, and the group frequently discussed various problems related to teaching and teacher identity. In their portfolios, some student teachers revealed that they had found these reflections as the most useful element of the subject methods seminar.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine their significance for the respondents and their development as teachers. Beliefs and conceptions, expressed verbally, are probably never totally identical with the ideas in mind, and what is more crucial, they may have very little in common with the activity in realistic situations.

It is premature to interpret the impact of the teacher education programme because of its short duration. In analysing their own development at the end of the semester the student teachers estimated that their teaching skills and use of methodology had improved the most; they made very detailed observations of their own action, but also saw the difficulty and diversity of the process of becoming a teacher. The present data confirm the necessity of the intensive, and even more conscious reflection on the student experience of learning to teach. It also seems to be important for teacher educators and supervisors of teaching practice to pay more attention to the emotional needs of the student teachers, especially in the beginning.

The experiences and findings reported in the present study have been considered in the planning of content and assignments in the current history education course, with a particular and more systematic emphasis on reflection on prior beliefs and personal development. The method seminar includes a number of opportunities for discussion on the role and expertise of history teachers. Not surprisingly, the student teachers in the present study also underlined their difficulties in classroom settings and in encountering the diverse problems related to student–teacher interaction. In order to provide prospective history teachers, and other subject-specific teacher groups, better preparation in this field, the teacher educators and supervisors of teaching practice over a number of school subjects planned together a pilot course with specific emphasis on interaction and solving classroom problems. The course programme consists, among other things, of systematic observation and analysis of classroom behaviour and problem-solving strategies, and reporting on the findings in simulated teachers' staff room meetings. With this extension, we try to encourage the student teachers to use collaborative methods and to create willingness to discuss professional matters across school subjects.

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