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“This has more to do with who I am than with my skills” – student teacher subjectification in Finnish teacher education

abstract

This article responds to the argument that in order to offer responsive teacher education which acknowledges student teachers as active members in their education process, teacher educators need to know more about who student teachers are. The context of the research is Finland, in which teacher education is highly selective. The interest in this article is on the process of shaping and re-shaping of student teacher-selves in response to the surrounding implicit norms – a process of student teacher subjectification. Using purposefully constructed narrative data and thematical analysis we identified the social and cultural expectations towards potential teachers as students have come to understand them.
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“This has more to do with who I am than with my skills” – student teacher subjectification in Finnish teacher education

1. Introduction

During formal teacher education student teachers not only acquire content knowledge, pedagogical skills and educational attitudes, but they also construct a sense of themselves as teachers (Rots, Kelchtermans, & Aeltermann, 2012). They make sense not only of the ‘how’ of teaching, but also of the ‘who’ of teaching. Although, to some extent student teachers may construct their student-selves and teacher-selves freely, it is clear that this freedom is at the same time limited by existing normative ideas: the word ‘teacher’ is not an empty category for student teachers to fill for themselves as they learn about their future work. In contrast, it is already overpopulated with competing contents: forms of knowledge, desires, pleasures, and fears (Taguchi 2005, 245), “designated identities” (Sfard & Prusak 2005), perspectives of “how to be” (Anspal, Eisenschmidt, & Löffström, 2012, 198; Zembylas, 2003a, 122), and also “stories to live by” (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009). These contents are not merely neutral or descriptive alternatives students teachers can freely choose from, but all have a strong normative and prescriptive force, representing the “true” knowledge, the “right” sense of identity, the “proper” stories of teacher lives, etc. These are normative since only some constructions of teacher-selves are perceived as legitimate within the profession (Bloomfield, 2010, 228).

In this paper the interest is on identifying the content of these norms as well as the production of their legitimacy. In particular we use the accounts of Finnish student teachers on their access to the teacher education programme as a lens to identify and unpack this process of the production of student teacher selves. Finland is well known to be one of the most successful education systems in the world, when measured in terms of success in international standardized tests. Various authors have seen this especially interesting (e.g. Sahlberg 2011), since formal normative guidelines for teachers as well as external assessment of the outcomes are completely absent in the Finnish system. This makes Finland an ideal context for looking into the norms student teachers produce for themselves.

Student teachers who enter teacher education program are not passive receptors of normative processes, but active agents who interpret and learn from their experiences (Rots, Kelchtermans & Aelterman 2012; Lortie 1975). As student teachers become exposed to new theories or perspectives,
they view these through their already developed, well-established systems of knowledge and beliefs on teaching and being a teacher (Furlong 2013, Taguchi 2007). Hillevi Lenz Taguchi (2007) provides the metaphor of a ‘toolbox’. She states that her students don’t come to their education with an empty toolbox needing to be filled with educational theories and methods, but rather with a toolbox already filled (and continuously refilling itself), with tools which rather need to be critically unpacked. For her, teacher education is about practicing a continuous process of unpacking and repacking what is already in this toolbox, relating it to other ways of thinking, and constructing new transgressive supplements. These, in turn, need to be deconstructed and reconsidered again and again, as a continuously self-reflexive process (Taguchi, 2007). Similarly, Green and Reid (2008) speak about the process of un-inscribing and re-inscribing meanings through teacher education; Donna Phillips (2010) speaks about the mind-body in motion; and Cochran-Smith (2003) speaks of learning through unlearning. There is much to unpack: student teachers not only have over a decade of previous personal experiences with teachers (Lortie 1975), but there are also lay theories and culturally embedded archetypes of teaching (Furlong, 2013). These are negotiated simultaneously with official curricula, practice school staff and curriculum, teacher educators’ professional ambitions, students’ professional ambitions and personal histories, peers, material surroundings (Taguchi 2005), schools in which students substitute, media… Thus, teacher education is not a top down process in which knowledge and perspectives are transmitted from the formal institute to the students, but a process in which student teachers engage with multiple directions.

Furthermore, it seems more appropriate to think of formal teacher education not simply as something being done to student teachers but rather as something they do to themselves as they negotiate with the above mentioned various directions. In order to offer responsive teacher education that acknowledges student teachers as active members in this process, it is important to understand in more detail who our students are when entering teacher education as well as who they are shaping themselves into (Anspal et al., 2012, pp. 198, 214; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Furlong, 2013; Lamote & Engels, 2010, p. 3). Informed by poststructuralist theorizations we refer to the process of shaping and re-shaping of selves in response to the material discursive surroundings, as subjectification (Davies 2001, Green and Reid 2008, Jackson and Mazzei 2012, Taguchi 2005, Youdell 2006 and Zembylas 2003b). Theorizations of subjectification will provide tools for thinking (Jackson & Mazzei 2012) about student teachers’ emerging selves in this article.
The context of this research is Finland, where teacher education programs are highly selective: only approximately 4% of the candidates applying for the teacher education programmes are accepted. By asking selected students explain why they think they were selected, we can learn about two things: On one hand, their accounts speak of the social and cultural expectations towards potential teachers in society, as they have come to think of these while preparing for the application. On the other hand, their accounts reveal their constitutions of self in relation to these expectations. We will use student teachers’ perceptions of their acceptance in the teacher education program as a way to identify the normative teacher images student teachers negotiate with and the various margins they have when negotiating normative images.

We will begin the article by explaining the theoretical framework on student teacher subjectification, after which we will describe the methodology relying on narrative data and thematic analysis. The results will identify the social and cultural expectations towards potential teachers as students have come to understand them, show the process of shaping and re-shaping of student teacher-selves in response to the surrounding implicit norms and, identify different margins of freedom students have when negotiating different elements of normative teacher images.

2. Theoretical framework: teacher’s self and subjectification in teacher education

In poststructural theories, the subject is seen to be in a continuous process of being constituted, reconstituted, and reconstituting herself/himself. Poststructural theories of subjectivity posit a notion of the ‘self’ as the site of disunity and conflict that is always in process, and produced within specific power relations (Jackson & Mazzei 2012, 117). Rather than as coherent ‘being’, self is seen as constantly ‘becoming’ as a response to current conditions (Aldenmyr, 2013, 346). Self, thereby, is not a possession but, rather, a verb and a relation (see also Holquist, 1990). This approach emphasizes that subjectivity is not so much something we have as something we do as we shape and reshape ourselves in response to the surroundings (see also Watson, 2006, 509). This shaping and reshaping of self is referred to as subjectification (Davies 2001, Green and Reid 2008, Jackson and Mazzei 2011, Taguchi 2005, Youdell 2006 and Zembylas 2003b). Although done by an individual, subjectification arises not so much from the individual but from the conditions of possibility – the discourses which prescribe not only what is a desirable form of subjectivity but also what is recognizable as an acceptable form of subjectivity (Davies et al., 2001, 172). In this
way, subjectivity is significant only for as long as it is implicated within a discourse (Youdell 2006; see also Watson, 2007, 383-384), i.e. the bodies of ideas that emerge within and reflect specific power relations rendering some things as common sense and other things nonsensical (Youdell 2006, 35), making some ways of thinking, speaking and being appropriate and meaningful and others not.

In this way, a teacher’s self is not something constituted freely, but something limited by culturally available subject positions (Coldron & Smith, 1999, 712; Karlsson, 2013; Lamote & Engels, 2010, 5; Watson, 2007; Youdell 2006), i.e. the prescribed positions available to one as a subject in a particular discursive context. The available positions depend on the way different discourses intersect (e.g. ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, conviction…). During teacher education, student teachers draw on the intersecting discourses and the subject positions they make available in order to construct an idea of a proper teacher (Lamote & Engels, 2010, 4; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013, 43; Bloomfield, 2010). Teacher’s self can thus be considered a “discursive accomplishment (Zembylas, 2003b, 114), shaped in relation to norms, expectations, emotions and experiences (Aldenmyr, 2013, 346).

In this subjectification process, students may learn more about who they should be than who they could become (Green and Reid 2008, see also Trent, 2011, 530), and find themselves caught between what they wish to be on the one hand and what various others tell them they should be on the other (Rots et al 2012; Phelan et al 2006). The result may be a subject that fits neatly into the available subject positions, or a subject that cannot find a position that fits, that resists the available positions for teachers (Hekman 2010, 25), or that undergoes a transformation of self in order to ‘change into’ a teacher and adapt their mind, body and emotions to fit the norms they have detected (Malderez, Hobson, Tracey, & Kerr, 2007, 230). Failure to find and take on an available subject position may lead to giving up the aspiration to be a teacher (Phelan et al., 2006; Rots et al., 2012; Sumara, D., Davis, B. & Iftody, T., 2008; Youdell, 2006). Whatever the case, however, there is no single causal factor determining the subject; the elements of subjectivity intra-act in a complex web (Hekman 2010, 25).

Subjectification encompasses the effort invested into learning to read social expectations and submitting to these while, at the same time, learning to master the very same discourse to which one is submitted (Davies et al 2001, 181; see also Bloomfield, 2010, 222). When the individual ‘takes on’ any subject position, s/he typically believes she is the author of the discourse which s/he is
speaking – “It is the imaginary quality of the individual’s identification with a subject position which gives it so much psychological and emotional force” (Weedon, 1987, 31). One must submit in order to gain mastery (Davies et al 2001, 181). Even though the discursive frameworks create the conditions for subjectification, student teachers are not just passively subscribing to them. Subjectification works through the effort an individual invests into detecting, negotiating and meeting surrounding expectations (Davies et al 2001; Aldenmyr, 2013, 346). In this way, the discourses which limit the possible subjectivities of student teachers are produced also by student teachers themselves.

In order to learn about the discursive norms with which student teachers engage in their subjectification process, the central research question guiding our study was: when student teachers begin their studies, what expectations for future teachers do they believe they met when they were selected? What student teachers tell about their emerging teacher selves can be understood as the result of the discursive conditions in which they find themselves (Taguchi 2005, 250). This way, we can use the student teachers’ accounts as a lens to identify and understand the discourses that are at work and will deepen our understanding of the subjectification processes through which student teachers negotiate and develop their emerging teacher-selves.

3. Research context: Finnish teacher education

Although teaching is not a particularly highly paid profession in comparison to other professions in Finland, it is socially highly valued in the society. Teachers have a very high level of autonomy and many aspire to join the teaching force. For example, in 2013 the University of Oulu saw 1537 applicants to the Finnish speaking teacher education programmes, but of these applicants only 60 were selected into the general teacher education programmes\(^1\) (roughly speaking 4%). The university is one of seven universities in Finland with primary school teacher education programs. In order to deal with the mass of applicants nationally, the selection process has two phases. The first phase consists of a national exam. Based on their exam scores, applicants are invited to the second phase by each faculty of education. The second phase focuses on the candidates’ personal suitability and motivation (Malinen, Väisänen, & Savolainen, 2012). In the University of Oulu –

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\(^1\) In addition, 40 were selected to special programs with emphasis in art or technology, and another 20 through a separate procedure into an international teacher education program.
where our study was situated -, the second phase includes an essay, an interview and a ‘demonstration of a talent’ - assignment in which the participants are invited to present any talent they have. Based on their success in the second phase, a fixed number of applicants is accepted into the programs every year. The intake quantity is determined by the ministry of education based on their estimation of national need for teachers. The selected students will complete a Master’s in education before they are qualified as teachers. This usually takes 5 years.

Once teachers are qualified, there are no evaluation procedures for school teachers’ competences, and Finnish teachers are not controlled or evaluated in any official way. So, there are no officially approved teaching materials, no audits, no inspectorate, no standardized tests before the end of 12 years of schooling, no detailed national curriculum, and the first time the teachers must do a summative evaluation for their students is in the end of 8th or 9th grade. Instead of control and accountability, Finnish ministry of education explicitly emphasizes decentralization and teachers’ professional autonomy. The bulk of decisions regarding contents, teaching methods and assessment are made by teachers as reflective, autonomous professional experts (Malinen et al., 2012; Sahlberg, 2011; Simola, Rinne, Varjo, Pitkanen, & Kauko, 2009). Just as there are no external evaluation criteria for Finnish teachers, there are no external evaluation criteria to define good student teachers, since such criteria are considered to inevitably operate both in a reductionist way and are insensitive to the situation-specific and qualitative understanding that is grounded in lived experience of teachers in schools (Heilbronn, 2010, 3; Yandell, 2010, 19). The idea is that as autonomous professionals, teachers should not need external control for their high aspirations. Finnish teachers enjoy the trust of the general public and also of the political and even economic elite, which is rare in many countries (Simola 2005)

4. Methodology

This research is a qualitative interpretative study, using purposefully constructed narrative data and thematic data analysis. The data consisted of 60 narrative essays entitled “Why was I selected for teacher education?” The narrative essays were written by beginning student teachers. The essays were written during the first month of their studies, in the context of one course, taught by the first author. The participating students were mostly between 20 and 30 years of age, with the youngest being about 18 and the oldest over 40. The female- male gender ratio was about 40:20. Visually, the
students looked quite similar: all white, with largely similar outfits with very few subculture references, one skate border-rapper, 1 student with visible tattoos, one brightly colored hair, one woman with mild goth-type make up, no revealing clothing, a few with hats in class. The main goal of the course is to support student teachers as they prepare for their first internship. The narrative approach in the data construction gave the students the opportunity to interpret the question and respond to it according to their own views and understandings. Apart from the length of the essay (preferably 3 pages), no particular writing instructions were given. Each essay was approximately 3 pages long, varying from 2 to 8 pages. The students were informed about the research during the course, and they were given a website in which they could read more about the research, the funder and the researcher and also raise concerns also anonymously and privately. Students were also informed that they could ask anything or request anytime that their essay is not used in research, and they were ensured that such request will have no influence on assessment. This was easy to ensure, since neither the essays nor the course were evaluated in a summative way. In the end of the course, the students were informed about the preliminary analysis, and the results were also used pedagogically, to address the issues students raised about the norms.

The question guiding our interpretative analysis was: What reasons do beginning student teachers identify for their selection to the teacher education program? The data-analysis began with 2 preliminary reading rounds of the entire dataset to get an overall sense of acquaintance with the data. As a next step, each essay was interpretatively coded, identifying all the reasons students implicitly or explicitly stated for their selection. An example of an explicit statement would be “I think I was selected because I am empathetic and genuinely love children”. In this case the codes listed would be “empathetic” and “love children”. An example of an implicit statement, was an elaborate narration of personal biographical experiences prior to the selection. In this case the code listed would be “personal experiences”. All reasons were highlighted in the essay and paraphrased when needed (for example “personal experiences”). All essays included multiple codes. For example, the account of personal experiences describing the becoming of an empathetic person, would also be coded “empathy”.

As a following phase in the analysis, we conducted a horizontal, cross case-analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), looking for systematic differences and similarities in the perceptions of the students (as reflected in their essays). For this purpose, all codes were inserted to one table, and arranged and re-arranged until they began to form distinctive categories, which we then tried to define as precise and distinctive as possible. This was done by making sure that all the data actually
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could be included in the categories and no relevant data were left out. In this line of inductive analysis we were guided by the constant comparative method (Strauss, 1967). The established categories contain all the replies given in the essays. Not all categories were present in all essays, but all essays included more than one category. The final categories including all the codes, describing all the replies are listed in table 1.

In the following phase of the analysis we identified order of importance in the categories (hierarchy), looking for the relative weight or importance given to the different categories. In other words, we looked into how students wrote about each category: as the main reason for acceptance or rather as a secondary reason. A category was interpreted to be a main reason if the author phrased it in terms of “I was selected because…”, if the students writes about it at length, or if other categories were explicitly mentioned as additional reasons (“also my field experience must have helped”). After the reasons were identified and hierarchy established, the analysis continued by a more detailed look into the main reasons student teachers mentioned, eventually resulting in the identification and definition of normative teacher images.

5. Findings

We will present the findings in two sections, first, describing the reasons student teachers identify for their selection and second, identifying normative ideas that are reflected in these reasons and how students negotiated these norms.

5.1. “Why was I selected?”

As student teachers began formal teacher education, they viewed character, effort, motivation and values as most important for their entrance into teacher education, and these were complemented by experience, skills and emotional support from significant others.

TABLE 1 HERE

5.1.1. Personal motivation

“I think they saw I really want this”

Personal motivation was commonly viewed as a main reason for selection. There were four general categories of interests motivating students’ commitment in the application: 1) field specific, which can be characterized as responses to the question “How do my motives serve the needs of the profession?”, 2) altruistic, which can be characterized as responses to the question “What have the
occupation and I to offer children or society?”, 3) other personal motives, which can be characterized as responses to the question “What can the studies and the occupation give me?” 4) unspecific motives (e.g. “eagerness to be allowed into the program”).

5.1.3. Personal characteristics
“"I think getting in has more to do with who I am than with the entrance exam as such”

Personal characteristics were often explicitly stated as main reason for selection. Table 1 lists these in detail. Some essays present these characteristics as static and “acquired”, such as “I am empathetic”, whereas others approach them as “processes” in which they are engaged in order to further develop them, e.g. “I’m learning to be more self-confident all the time”. The essays also commonly spoke of being “the right” person, a “natural” teacher or “the type” to be a teacher, and customarily left this undefined. On the other hand, in 9 instances the students referred to their perceived deviance from a particular norm as a reason for selection, e.g. “I’m not the prototype”, “I’m different”, similarly commonly without further clarification. The responses often explicitly stated not having assumed any role in order to pass the entrance assignment: “I was myself/genuine/real me”. This means that, 1) student teachers attributed their selection in terms of a limited set of personal characteristics, which they not only presented, but that they felt they had or were in the process of acquiring and; 2) student teachers also noted and reproduced the existence of a teacher-type that, seemed to require no explaining.

5.1.4. Personal efforts
""I got in because I worked for it”

The third main reason stated for selection had to do with the efforts they had made to become selected. In addition to studying for the written exam (up to several months of daily, scheduled studying), effort had been invested in thinking about what one saw as the norms for a good teacher, self-reflective analysis on what makes the applicant a potential teacher, and developing characteristics one saw as appropriate for teachers (most commonly developing self-confidence and sociability). Some applicants had done academic studies or practical work in the field for the past year(s) in order to be more suitable.

“After not being selected the first time, I was forced to think about my plans. Why was I not selected? Is teaching not for me? Am I not fit for it? What are they looking for? I had been honest in my responses, so what was it in me that was not good enough? Is there a mold to which I just do not fit? Later I began thinking that there must be personal strengths in me I can work on […]” (The student was accepted after the second try)
5.1.5. **Personal values**

Although “personal values” were commonly mentioned as a reason for selection, they were rarely explicitly defined. Instead, they were simply stated to be “right” or “healthy”. However, values were implicitly and explicitly discussed in connection with other categories, for example: “I am equitable”, or “I have experience in taking on responsibility”. The values discussed fall under the headings responsibility, love and equity. Values were presented as both main and additional reason.

5.1.6. **Former experiences**

Personal or professional experience was mentioned as a trigger for motivation, or as a part of efforts invested in preparing for applying, but not as a main reason. When describing their experiences, students wrote about experiences in previous studies in the field, experiences in practical work in the field, personal history during childhood or adulthood, including positive or negative experiences that motivated the student to embark on a career in education, personal activities, hobbies and career moves which taught the student something significant about their own professional interests.

“I think everything I have lived through and done until now has led to this”

5.1.7. **Particular teacher skills**

Skills were never mentioned as the sole reason or the main reason for selection. Commonly skills discussed involved social and emotional skills, such as negotiation skills, ability to perform under pressure and ability for reflective self-development. More general skills, (organizing skills, teaching, technology, sport, music etc.), when mentioned at all, were introduced as an additional factor. The small size of the skills- category in relation to the other categories more directly linked with the applicant’s person implies that the students view their potential in terms of their person than their skills.

5.1.8. **Significant others**

Finally, Significant others were not commonly mentioned, and never as the sole reason for selection. When mentioned, they were discussed as one of the main aspects of the application process (“I could never have done this if it wasn’t for my partner”).

5.2. **Students negotiating normative teacher images**

In the next stage of analysis we identified normative teacher images present in the main categories identified above. A category was validated as a normative image if students expressed that they
perceived such a norm to exist either by verbalizing it or by contesting it or. The analysis shows four general norms: “being motivated and investing effort”, “representing teacher type”, “having the right values” and, “being willing to shape one’s self”. The first three emerged directly from the categories presented above, while the fourth one was identified in several different categories. After identifying four general norms, we looked into the extent to which students negotiated the various norms. We found this was quite different for different norms: the teacher type was *openly negotiated*, the willingness to shape one’s self was *rarely negotiated*, values were *not negotiated*, and motivation and effort were *silenced*.

6.1.1. Representing the teacher type
As presented above, there were multiple instances in which students stated they were “the type” or “the right person” or explicitly distanced themselves from a “typical case” – in both cases equally reinforcing the idea that there is something like a “typical case”. Although explicit descriptions or definitions of such a “typical case” were utterly absent in the data, a description can be drawn on the seven characteristics commonly used to describe one’s emerging self as teacher: empathy, reflectivity, sociability, self-confidence, positive predominant mood, determinacy, activity. Whether student teachers agree with the normative image or not, they nevertheless acknowledged it and negotiated with it openly by engaging with questions like “*what is the typical teacher like and do I match it?*” They discussed the various characteristics of a proper teacher, making arguments for and against particular characteristics, for example “*Not everyone has to be sociable all the time. I’m sure we need also teachers who give space to others*”. This makes the first normative teacher image, “representing the teacher type”, something detected and negotiated by students, but not one to which they uncritically submit as they are subjectificated.

6.1.2. Having the right values
As presented above, “right values” were commonly perceived as important for selection, yet rarely defined. The fact that such “right” values were commonly mentioned but not contested or discussed further suggest that their status is so self-evident that there is no need for clarification or explicit definition. At the same time, in the responses there was a general focus on responsibility, love and equity. Based on this, we deduce that there is a normative and fairly uncontested teacher image including the values of responsibility, love and equity. In spite of their apparent truism, these are quite undefined, it is not at all clear what these values actually mean or what they look like in practice. The fact that the norm was commonly verbalized but not once contested makes it a non-negotiated norm.
As non-negotiated, taken for granted norms “right values” potentially have power, since they there are no verbal tools to bring them to discussion. At the same time, as unclearly defined norms “right values” can be attached to a large variety of issues to which they can be connected. This makes the norm of “having right values” interesting for discursive power. For example, a suggestion during an internship that a student is not responsible, loving or equal, is likely to have a strong emotional effect on the student and, at the same time, the student has very few tools to contest the claim.

6.1.3. Being motivated and investing effort
Since so many students had invested so much effort into becoming selected and were so motivated, “willingness to invest effort” and motivation as such become a normative image. As presented above, not all students were fully motivated and willing to invest amounts of effort, but they still had to position themselves in relation to the normative teacher image in which efforts and motivation are central. The 5 students who explicitly mentioned not having invested a lot of effort described feelings of guilt: “I’m the odd one out, here.” Two students mentioned secretly not being certain about the depth of their motivation to become teachers. Lack of motivation was something they felt they needed to hide from public discussion. In other words, “Being motivated and investing effort” was a silenced norm: Students who had not invested effort or did not feel complete motivation, mentioned actively staying quiet about this. The discussion about motivation and effort was not absent as much as it was silenced.

This norm links directly to the Finnish norm for teachers, on which the lack of accountability measures relies: as autonomous professionals teachers are expected to work hard and be motivated. The possibility that Finnish teachers would not be motivated would risk the entire system which relies precisely on their intrinsic motivation. Thus it makes sense that students learn to silence possible lack of motivation.

6.1.4. Being willing to shape one’s self
Finally, the (emerging) self of the student was attributed a central role in the successful application process. All the main reasons and one of the additional reasons (personal experience) are directly related to the self of the applicant. Furthermore, the ability and willingness to shape their self, is echoed through several main and additional categories. In the data it is spoken of as a skill (of reflectively developing one’s self), as an outcome of experiential learning process (in which one learned to constantly develop one’s self), effort invested into the application process (“reflecting and developing one’s self”), as a part of characteristics perceived to be important for teachers, and also as a motivation to continuously develop oneself as teacher. This shaping of one’s self was
explicitly distinguished from “playing a role” or pretending. Students commonly emphasized that they presented what they perceived to be their “genuine selves”. Thus, the final norm that arises from the data is the willingness and ability to explicitly put their selves on the line already during the application procedure. In two accounts the students contested the normative expectation of shaping self, thus validating the existence of such norm (“I do not completely buy into this ‘constantly developing teacher’ -ideal. There must be some point when you are ready.”). Although the norm was commonly explicitly verbalized, it was fairly uncontested by students as a part of their subjectification process.

In sum, the different degrees to which the norms were seen as negotiable, ranged from open to silenced, as presented above. This means that as students construct their selves in relation to the elements of normative teacher images, they have different margins of freedom for negotiating the different elements.

7. Discussion

This research shows that when future teachers reflect what makes them good potential teachers in an educational system in which they are not externally assessed, they do not do this in terms of teaching skills or content knowledge but in terms of values such as equity, responsibility and love, characteristics such as empathy, confidence, sociability and positive mood, motivation and effort invested and their willingness to develop self. In other words, the lack of focus on measurable teaching outcomes (e.g. high stakes testing) is present already as students begin their studies.

At the same time, this research shows that even in an educational system in which official normative evaluations for teachers are absent, normative ideas are still implicitly present in the “lived curriculum” of teacher education (see also Phelan et al 2006, 162). Student teachers are aware - and reproduce ideas - of what is desired of them or perceived as appropriate in the cultural environment. In the pull of various discourses, the normative pressure ’works’ through their detecting, enacting, negotiating and silencing of norms in order to constitute a self that has “the right to claim a position within the profession” (Bloomfield 2010, 218). Thus the results of this study suggest that external pressure is not necessary for producing teachers we want to have; future teachers will efficiently produce these norms for themselves.
Previous research suggests that the normative teacher images reconstructed are not simply imposed on students from above but are enacted through subjectification processes. This research further highlights that the norms are enacted as student teachers shape their selves. This is significant, since the results of this study implicate that willingness to shape self is one of the most pervasive norms for student teachers. Whereas the norms regarding, for example, typical teacher are somewhat flexible, the norms regarding personal investment and willingness to shape one’s self are far less negotiable. This deserves attention. This was the most striking result of this research: student teachers commonly attributed their selection to their emerging self rather than to anything else (like their skills or significant others), while, at the same time, the analysis shows that students have very little room in negotiating their voluntary and strong investment in shaping their selves. This indicates that the most pervasive norm for beginning student teachers might be precisely the voluntary and strong investment in shaping self. In fact, this has a direct connection to the prominent discourse of reflective teachers (e.g. Grant & Zeichner 1984) which emphasizes similar voluntary constant personal professional development in response to surrounding demands.

The margins for negotiating different norms are determined by the discursive context and reflect the implicit power of various norms. The demand for investing self highlights that students who are not willing to invest their selves entirely and thoroughly may find it difficult to fit into the available subject positions – since subject positions themselves are defined partly precisely by the normative expectation of willingness to fit in and invest their selves for the process. For example, as we discussed the research with the students after the data collection, one student told about dying her bright red hair brown for the day of the application interview. Another student told that he covered his tattoos during the application, and also covers them during internships. In this way, the norms are turned into practice as student teachers willingly shape their emerging selves – such willingness itself being also normatively expected. This brings an interesting and slightly dark twist to the idea of reflective teacher: since norms are enacted as students shape their selves, and since shaping selves is normatively expected of students, the reflective teacher-ideal can be seen as contributing to the subtle normative control of teachers.

When norms are stated and controlled from above, as they are in many educational systems today, student teachers who cannot find an appropriate subject position have something or someone (above) to resist. In these contexts, students may be able to find a subject position as one resisting the external norms, and constitute a self based on such resistance. We wonder, when norms in teacher education are entirely enacted as student teachers shape their selves, is a subject position based on resistance a considerable option, or does resistance to norms simply result in seizing to
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pursue career as teacher? The complete absence of discussing values in the data, the silences around lack of motivation or invested effort, and the commonly verbalized commitment and willingness to shape self endlessly, would suggest that beginning students have not identified much space for resistance. This suggests that a system without formal norms for future teachers is thus delusive, only masking more subtle, less controllable normative power processes, influencing student teachers’ emerging subjectivities and available subject positions.

Finally, the fact that students attribute a significant role in the selections to their emerging self, and the fact that they see their self as something they must constantly shape and reshape, also raises a question about the effect of highly selective teacher education: could it be that, not only do specific emerging subjectivities become selected, but also that specific subjectivities become to be shaped and emerge in order to be selected? This shaping takes place before formal teacher education and would raise important questions about the role of entrance exams in producing teacher subjectivities.

References


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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>definition of the category</th>
<th>sub-categories</th>
<th>Hierarchy</th>
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</table>
| **Personal motivation (57/60):** the interests that drive one to be committed to the application process, studies and/or teachers’ work | - study-related or unclear interests (6)  
- other personal interests (25)  
- field specific interests (42)  
- altruistic interests (31) | Main reason |
| **Personal characteristics (55/60):** conceptions of self in relation to the perceived demands of teachers’ work | - empathy (22)  
- reflectivity (18)  
- sociability (18)  
- self-confidence (25)  
- positive predominant mood (31)  
- determinacy (13)  
- activity (27) | Main reason |
| **Personal efforts (41/60):** purposeful energy invested in becoming selected | - preparation for entrance tests (31)  
- academic studies in education (5)  
- familiarizing oneself with the practical work (5)  
- self-reflection (17) | Main reason |
| **Personal values (42/60):** personal ethical stands perceived as essential in teachers’ work | - responsibility (22)  
- love (17)  
- strive for equity (19) | Main/ additional reason |
| **Former experiences (49/60):** previous personal or professional involvements perceived to indicate dedication or skill for teacher studies and teacher’s work | - previous studies in the field (8)  
- practical work in the field (24)  
- personal history (14)  
- personal activities (25) | Additional reason |
| **Particular teacher skills (47/60):** knowledge or abilities perceived as significant for successful selection, studies or occupation | - social skills (27)  
- study skills (10)  
- specific skills (8)  
- “realistic view of work” (8)  
- organization skills (7)  
- self-development skills (6)  
- emotional skills (7);  
- Multiple talents and knowhow (5)  
- teaching skills (5) | Additional reason |
| ** Significant others (14/60):** emotional support from someone perceived as significant for selection | - close relatives as teachers (6)  
- academic family (1)  
- friends in the field (3)  
- supportive friends and family (5) | Main reason |