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Openness to theory and its importance for pre-service teachers' self-efficacy, emotions, and classroom behaviour in the teaching practicum

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have shown a growing interest in the learning mechanism of student teachers. Our study seeks to contribute to this field by investigating student teachers' individual characteristics for learning during the practicum. We examined the interrelationship between student teachers' openness to theory, self-efficacy, emotions, and classroom behaviour during the field experience. It was expected that student teachers who were more open to (educational) theories would be more likely to develop a higher sense of self-efficacy, triggering positive emotions that would, in turn, foster their autonomy support for student learning in the classroom. The participants in the study were 117 pre-service student teachers from an Austrian university who were preparing for positions in secondary education in high-track schools. Their answers to questionnaires supported the predicted link between openness to theory, self-efficacy, and emotions, while no direct link could be found to autonomy support. These results are discussed in relation to concerns over the quality of student teacher training.

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1. Introduction

In current teacher education, there has been a clear shift towards stressing the importance of teaching practice, in particular through the teaching practicum[1] (for an overview, see Arnold, Gröschner, & Hascher, 2014; Zeichner, 2012, 2014). In addition, there has been an increase in research on the teaching practicum (for an overview, see Lawson et al., 2015). In this field, a growing body of studies has shown that the teaching practicum does not meet the high expectations with regard to teacher candidates' learning outcomes (e.g. Arnold et al., 2014; Hascher, 2012; Zeichner, 2012). In fact, the findings reveal that teacher candidates often fail to develop the desired skills and exhibit signs of problematic development, such as a tendency towards teacher-centred instruction rather than learner-oriented instruction or towards copying expert teachers'

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[1] There are a number of different terms that refer to the various forms of practical training in teacher education: student teaching, field experiences, teaching practice, clinical training, clinical teacher education, (guided) teaching experiences, internship, school practicum, school-based teacher education, and school placement, to name a few. In this article, we use the term 'teaching practicum' (Lawson, Çakmak, Gündüz, & Busher, 2015), which we define as follows: A teaching practicum is a mandatory module in a pre-service teacher-education programme that takes place in a school under the supervision of a school mentor for a limited time period. It seeks to provide student teachers with an opportunity to gain experience in teaching practice through their own teaching and/or co-teaching.

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'tips and tricks' instead of developing sustainable individual professional practices (e.g. Alexander, Muir, & Chant, 1992; Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1985).

These outcomes call for an explanation. Some proposed explanations point to quality issues in the teaching practicum, such as differences in the opportunities to learn (e.g. Hsieh, Law, Wang, Hsieh, & Tang, 2011), the lack of professionalization of mentor teachers, and the insufficient quality of mentoring (e.g. Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011; McIntyre, Hagger, & Wilkin, 2013). Another perspective highlights learners' individual differences (Frost, Prenzel, & Seidel, 2013) and the effects of the characteristics of teacher candidates that may influence the processes at work during the teaching practicum and their outcomes (e.g. Endedijk, Donche, & Osterheert, 2014; Hascher & Hofmann, 2014). Thus far, little is known about the role of student characteristics. This research gap has been confirmed by Lawson et al. (2015): In their systematic review of 114 studies, the authors find that only a very few address teacher candidates' characteristics such as their expectations as a research topic.

Our study seeks to contribute to filling this gap by investigating the role of teacher candidates' characteristics in learning during the teaching practicum that forms part of an Austrian university teacher-education programme. We will test whether individual characteristics are associated with student teachers' subjective evaluation of an aspect of their teaching quality in the practicum, namely autonomy-supportive teaching behaviour. With this study, we aim to add evidence to the research on the preconditions of effective learning during the teaching practicum, as there is still a lacuna in this field with regard to learning in teacher education. The results contribute to answering the question of how student teachers' self-evaluations of teaching quality (which function as a key variable of reflection on action) are affected by individual characteristics.

1.1. Theoretical frame for learning in the teaching practicum

A variety of factors may affect the efficacy of the teaching practicum with regard to teacher candidates' learning and teaching behaviours. Thus far, researchers have pointed to the relevance of the culture of the school sites (e.g. Hagger & McIntyre, 2006), the quality and organization of the teacher-education programme in terms of the links between university-based courses and the teaching practicum (e.g. Allen, 2009), the aptitude of university and school mentors as well as the quality of their collaboration with teacher candidates (e.g. Zeichner, 2010), and the cooperation among teacher candidates (e.g. Lu, 2010). As noted above, far less is known about the role that student characteristics play in the teaching practicum with regard to teacher candidates' learning processes and outcomes. This is surprising, as research on instruction has demonstrated the importance of individual characteristics for school students' learning: Findings have revealed that individual aspects (such as a student's pre-knowledge, motivation, emotions, and learning strategies) are crucial factors in the success of learning processes (e.g. Hattie, 2009).

Helmke (2008) proposes the offer-and-use model, which describes the factors that impact students' learning and performance in school. Basically, the model indicates that the environment provides certain learning offers, but that the learning outcomes depend on the use of these offers by the individual learner. Hascher and Kittinger (2014) argue that this model can be adapted to student teachers' learning and can serve as a frame to explain learning in the teaching practicum (see Fig. 1). Their model assumes that the quality of learning processes and learning outcomes is influenced by characteristics of the teaching practicum such as structural aspects (e.g. single or tandem placement, short- or long-term practicum), organizational aspects (e.g. university–school cooperation, school mentor professionalization), and social aspects (e.g. school social climate, teacher candidate's integration into the teaching staff). In addition, individual factors such as cognitions (e.g. pre-knowledge, attitudes, beliefs), motivation (e.g. interest, goal orientation), and emotions (e.g. enjoyment,

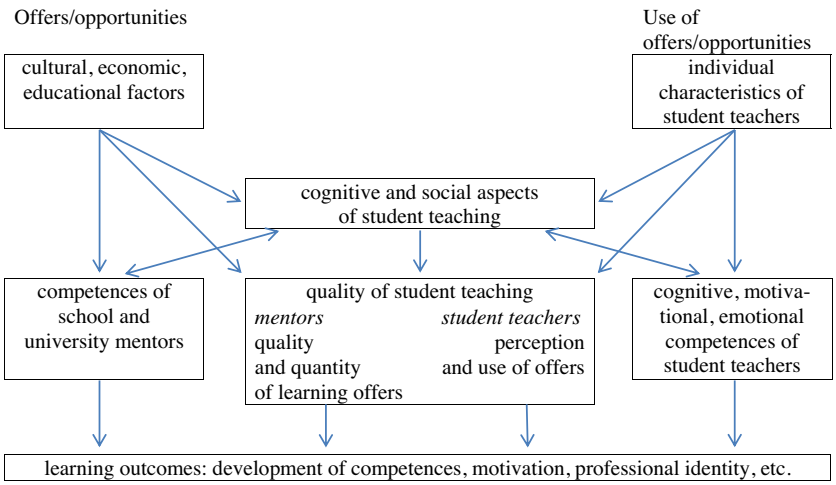

Fig. 1. Offer-and-use model of the teaching practicum.

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