



Beliefs about teaching: Persistent or malleable? A longitudinal study of prospective student teachers' beliefs



Erika Löfström ^{a,*}, Katrin Poom-Valickis ^b

^a University of Helsinki, Centre for Research and Development of Higher Education, Institute of Behavioural Sciences, Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, P.O. Box 9, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

^b Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Department of Teacher Education, Uus-Sadama 5, Tallinn 10120, Estonia

HIGHLIGHTS

- Results on the teachers' knowledge-base measure and metaphors align to some extent.
- Beliefs as measured on the knowledge-base instrument tended to remain unchanged.
- When beliefs changed, metaphors tended to express expanded views of teaching.
- Students entering teacher education scored higher on "Pedagogue" than others.
- Teacher as didactics expert negatively predicted entrance to teacher education.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 September 2012

Received in revised form

6 June 2013

Accepted 11 June 2013

Keywords:

Metaphors

Teacher education

Beliefs about teaching

Teacher's knowledge base

Mixed methods

ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study focused on change in university students' beliefs about the role of teachers. The students ($n = 80$) were Estonian undergraduates, whose beliefs were investigated in the first and third years of their studies and followed up to the point at which the students either entered teacher education or chose other paths. Beliefs about teaching were neither unambiguously persistent nor malleable. Students who continued in teacher education exhibited stronger beliefs about the teacher as pedagogue and aligned less with the belief that the teacher's role is to be a subject matter expert than peers who did not choose teacher education.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Many countries are forced to admit that teacher education has not been as popular a choice among young people as might be hoped. The numbers of students entering teacher training are diminishing. For example, in the Nordic countries the number of students pursuing teacher education have significantly diminished: from 4% in Sweden to 45% in Iceland, with Finland as the only exception (Comparative Study of Nordic Teacher-Training Programmes, 2009, p. 520). The issue of students choosing or not choosing teacher education is also important in Estonia. The teaching work force in Estonia is growing older, and there is a lack of

teachers in certain subject areas (Ülevaade Eesti õpetajaskonnast, 2008). The question of recruiting sufficient numbers of students to subject teacher education is urgent in many European countries. Countries such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and Estonia are finding a situation in which 70% or more of the teaching work force at the secondary level is at least 40 years old (OECD, 2012), which will result in a major generation shift. This makes urgent the need to educate teachers to fill the gaps over the coming years created by the large number of teacher retirements. For this reason, there is growing concern worldwide about attracting suitable people to the teaching profession (cf. Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000).

Prospective student teachers who are identified early could be supported in their decision-making about study and career choices prior to choosing (or not choosing) teacher education. There are great expectations of teacher education to solve the problem of shrinking numbers of teachers, but Estonia, among other countries,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +358 (0) 50 4150 150.

E-mail addresses: Erika.lofstrom@helsinki.fi (E. Löfström), katrinpv@tlu.ee (K. Poom-Valickis).

is grappling with the problem that students with completed BA degrees do not see teacher education as an attractive option. In Estonia, subject teacher education study places are typically filled without any competition, and institutions of teacher education struggle even to fill the quota of state-paid study places in certain subject teacher programmes. Unrealistic views about the role of a teacher have been suggested as a reason for the dropouts from teacher education and the teaching profession in the early stages of a career (cf. Thomson, Turner & Nietfield, 2012). Prospective teachers and student teachers experience a conflict between their expectations and the reality of the conditions of teaching, which they encounter in their first school experiences during their training (Chambers & Roper, 2000).

Another problem that contributes to the need to find new ways of supporting students' choice of teacher education is a structural one. Compared to graduates from integrated teacher education programmes (e.g. pre-school and primary education in Estonia), graduates from non-integrated teacher education programmes represent a negative predictor of entrance into the teaching profession (Rots, Aelterman, Vlerick & Vermeulen, 2007). The 3 + 2 model of university education applied in Estonia and other European countries as a result of the Bologna Process means that the first three years are devoted to subject studies, after which students may enter a master's programme in a subject area or in teacher education. Thus, subject teacher education relies on a non-integrated teacher education model. The challenge is that in a 3 + 2 teacher education system prospective teachers may be "lost" during the time of intensive subject study without any course in pedagogy to support those students who are potentially interested in teaching to develop a vision of teaching as a career choice. The question then becomes whether it is possible to support that "teacher potential" among university students prior to teacher education. As the teaching work force ages and the loss of students from the teacher training programmes increases, there is increased attention on teacher training, as well on support programmes for novice teachers in all European countries (Report on Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, 2008).

At Tallinn University, some initiatives have already been undertaken, for instance, introductory pedagogical courses, observational practice at schools, as well as the course *Studies and Career Opportunities in the Educational Field*; these are on offer at the bachelor's level to all students. The work with prospective teacher education students is also important because of the large number of students whose study goals are not yet clear. Our research with Estonian university students (Löfström, Poom-Valickis, Hannula, & Mathews, 2010) showed that almost a quarter of the students had unclear motives for pursuing studies in their chosen curriculum. By investigating students' beliefs about teaching and the changes in those beliefs during studies for the bachelor's degree, i.e. prior to entering teacher education, it may be possible to gain a better understanding of opportunities to identify and work with prospective teacher education students already during their bachelor's studies and thus help them to make carefully considered and reasonable career choices. We were also interested in finding out whether a student's beliefs about the teacher's role during the bachelor's programme are any indication of a future choice to enter teacher education.

2. Choosing a career in teaching

Previous research about career choices has focused on personal preferences and motivation as predictors of studies and careers in teaching. Teaching commitment and motivation influence entrance or intentions to enter teacher education (Rots et al., 2007; Rots, Aelterman, Devos & Vlerick, 2010). Factors influencing the choice

of teacher education include extrinsic motives and material reasons, such as job security; intrinsic motives and professional reasons, such as love of a subject; and altruistic motives/reasons, such as feelings of responsibility for children (e.g. Bastick 2000; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Richardson & Watt, 2005; Rinke, 2008). Altruistic and intrinsic motives are powerful motivators for teaching (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Richardson & Watt, 2005; Thomson et al., 2012). A combination of all motives, however, usually prevails, whereas just one type of motive would be very rare (cf. Thomson et al., 2012). While studies have focused on pre-service teachers' personal preferences and motivation to pursue a career in teaching (e.g. Bastick 2000; Rots et al., 2007, 2010; Thomson et al., 2012; Watt et al., 2012), little is known about higher education students' motivation in general to continue studies into teacher education, which is a crucial question given the challenges of non-integrated teacher education, retirement and recruitment problems.

In addition to the explicitly-named motives and interests that students are able to express as conscious choices or preferences, beliefs and their development could provide important information about students as prospective candidates for teacher education. While motives and interest provide information on consciously-held and therefore more tangible views, it may be worth exploring the less conscious aspects of human thinking, that is, beliefs that guide choices and actions. Thomson et al. (2012) propose that the motives and beliefs about teaching play an important role in shaping the students' career paths. There is some evidence for the notion that beliefs about teaching and of oneself as a teacher are related to the intention to enter teaching. Students with higher levels of teacher efficacy beliefs and stronger learner-orientated beliefs about teaching have been shown to be more likely to exhibit higher teaching commitment and subsequently a stronger intention to enter teaching (Rots et al., 2010).

Because students arrive at university as individuals with personal histories, personal understandings of teaching and learning, and decision paths that contribute to their choices vis-à-vis teacher education (Pinnegar, Mangelson, Reed & Groves, 2011), it is important to know more about the beliefs of those in the pool of prospective teacher education students. Such knowledge may provide teacher educators the opportunities to help students develop realistic images of the teaching profession and of themselves as future teachers in order to support a carefully considered and informed decision to choose the teaching profession (Spittle, Jackson, & Casey, 2009).

3. Beliefs about teaching

3.1. Beliefs in the process of teaching and learning

Student teachers' pre-teaching professional identities arise from their images of teachers, their beliefs and concepts of a "good teacher" and their personal theories about teaching (Flores & Day, 2006; Lortie, 1975; Sugrue, 1997). Various interpretations of beliefs have been suggested, thereby introducing ambiguity into the concept and its uses (cf. Pajares, 1992). We understand beliefs to be cognitive representations comprised of understandings and premises of a phenomenon or of the world around us (cf. Richardson, 2003). These understandings may not be logically structured, but they are "true" for the individual, i.e. beliefs can be understood in terms of what the individual hopes or accepts to be true. Beliefs are often unverified or unverifiable, as in the case of opinions (Richardson, 2003). Because of the importance or values attached to their beliefs, individuals are ready to act upon those beliefs and hold on to them whenever conflicting evidence is presented (Murphy & Mason, 2006.)

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/374070>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/374070>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)