CHAPTER 13

Bridging Research and Practice in Teacher Education

Creating a Conversational Community to Support Curriculum Development in Teacher Education

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Abstract

Research-based teacher education can be understood in different ways: as a call to understand teacher education institutions as research institutions, as the ambition to educate student teachers to have an inquiring attitude, as the basing of teacher education curricula on the latest research, or as a combination of all three.

In this chapter we reflect on a method of connecting research, curriculum development and practice in teacher education, presenting a case study of a conversational community of teacher educators and researchers. The aim of the conversational community was to understand the process of curriculum design in teacher education as an inspiring and practical combination of design research, self-study, collaborative action research and curriculum study by teacher educators. This process was supported by a conversational framework in which curriculum development was understood as an ongoing dialogue between vision, intentions, design and practice in the teacher education curriculum. Using the conversational framework in this single case study of a conversational community, we have tried to connect teacher education research, curriculum development and practice in a meaningful way.

Keywords

research-based teacher education – curriculum development – conversational community – conversational framework

1 Introduction

Research-based teacher education seems to become more and more standard for high quality teacher education practices (Munthe & Rogne, 2015; Puustinen

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et al., 2018). This raises the question of what exactly is meant by research-based teacher education. There are a number of possible answers to this question, as is shown in this volume. One way of understanding research-based teacher education to recognise that teacher education institutions themselves are increasingly becoming research institutions with PhD programmes; teacher educators with PhDs are engaging in regional, national and international research projects and thus contributing to the (teacher) education knowledge base. Examples here include the NAFOL national PhD school in Norway, the development of research programmes within teacher education institutions in the Netherlands and Flanders (see e.g., Tack & Vanderlinde, 2016), and the development of doctorate programmes (EQF level 8) with a special focus on teacher education, such as EDiTE.

A second way to understand research-based teacher education is through the increasing value that is placed on educating research-oriented teachers with an inquiring mindset who are able to use research outcomes within their daily practice (see e.g. Flores et al., 2016).

A third way of understanding research-based teacher education focuses on teacher educators, and highlights the use of research outcomes by teacher educators to draw up evidence-based teacher education curricula. Research outcomes are distributed through handbooks (see e.g. Peters, Cowie, & Menter, 2017 or Loughran & Hamilton, 2016) or journals, but also via initiatives such as the European InFo-TED, which aims to develop a knowledge base for teacher educators (Murray et al., 2017). This links closely with the 'What works' clearinghouses and initiatives such as the Education Endowment Foundation, which have been developed to make research evidence accessible for teachers in primary and secondary education. Within teacher education, parallels can be seen.

These three perspectives on research-based teacher education emphasise different aspects and will have different impact on teacher educators. The first one adds a new role to the work of teacher educators, namely the role of the teacher educator as researcher (Murray, 2010), but does not necessarily lead to dramatic changes in the way in which teacher educators educate student teachers. The second perspective changes teacher education by adding new goals and learning aims to teacher education curricula, changing some of their content and methods.

The third approach might have the most dramatic impact on teacher educators as the outcomes of education research can provide pointers both in terms of what (novice) teachers need to be able to do in schools (with implications for the content of teacher education curricula) and how teacher educators

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should prepare and support them in this (with implications for teacher education methodology).

However, the 'what works' focus of evidence based (teacher) education has met with some fundamental critiques. These focus on the idea that research is able to deliver guidelines on how to teach, warning that such an approach

– risks reducing the teacher (educator) to a recipient of protocols that are the result of careful studies, ignoring the practical wisdom of the teacher (educator). It thus contradicts the second perspective of the teacher (educator) as researcher.
– focuses on the 'how' of teaching. However, although research focusing on 'what works' can provide pointers with regard to the how within teacher education curricula, it cannot give answers with regard to the what and why, as these questions focus on decisions about what it is important to teach and seeks answers that relate to underlying values (Biesta, 2007).
– risks creating a mechanistic view of education, teaching and learning, by reducing learners to objects without intrinsic intentions, ignoring their role as active and conscious participants in the learning process (Korver, 2007; Van Manen, 1995).
– risks ignoring context-specific aspects (Hammerness & Craig, 2016).

This raises the question of how the three perspectives can be combined in an approach to teacher education that recognises the values of all three approaches and that values the active role of both the teacher educator and the student teacher.

In this chapter, we will recount a specific case in which we as teacher education researchers worked with two teacher educators in an attempt to connect research, curriculum development and practice in teacher education in a meaningful way. We used a reflective framework that can assist teacher educators to design teacher education curricula that recognise the key role of teacher educators as inquirers, that can create role models for student teachers, and that are consistent with a pedagogical relationship between teacher educators and their student teachers.

2 Education as Relationship

To understand this pedagogical relationship it is essential to consider the roles of teacher educators and student teachers. Every day, teacher educators face the challenge of judging and choosing what educational experiences their

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student teachers need and what it is possible to offer them. They need to transform these intentions into appropriate curricula, lesson plans and forms of assessment, but foremost into encounters that provide student teachers with experiences that allow them to develop their understanding and being. However, as their educational activity is directed at student teachers who are also active and reflective agents, the way such educational activities take place and what they bring about is never a given, no matter how well intended or designed they are.

We thus see teacher education as a reciprocal process between two active and reflective agents: the teacher educator and the student teacher. This process starts with a relationship between two (or more) human beings, and aims to foster the confidence and ability 'to be in the world' (Delors, 1996). Such confidence and ability can cover a variety of aspects of human intelligence, including the cognitive, social, moral, physical, creative, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (NIVOZ, 2018). This perspective conceives the core purpose of education as being pedagogical rather than selective (van Manen, 1995; cf. Biesta & Miedema, 2002; Biesta, 2019).

This pedagogical purpose involves creating and safeguarding the educational space and the conditions that allow for students' 'existence-as-a-subject', by opening up the world for learners and by arousing their desire to exist in and with the world in an adult manner (Biesta,2019; 2022). The pedagogue Max van Manen states that this requires learners to actively realise that they have been born into a condition of possibility and that to become a subject is to transform a possibility "into commitment, responsibility – one must choose a life" (Van Manen, 1991, p. 3). Whether, how or when the learner will respond to the call is out of the influence of the teacher as it is entirely up to the learner. As such, "[p]edagogy is the art of tactfully mediating the possible influences of the world so that the child is constantly encouraged to assume more responsibility for its personal learning and growth" (Van Manen, 1991, p. 80). This implies that education is a complex (social) reality that is made up of the conscious acts of reflexive agents. These acts are all part of the expertise and responsibility of educators who themselves need to be active and reflexive agents of education: they think and act on the basis of their thoughts, judgements, and decisions (Biesta, 2016, p. 203). A strong pedagogical focus calls for a teacher education curriculum that provides the space, conditions and experiences that invite teachers-to-be to desire to be in and with the world of education in an adult manner.

As a consequence, teacher education requires purposeful and conscious action from teacher educators, but it also requires tact to attune its thoughtful intentions to the reality of the encounter with their student teachers.

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> More than many vocations, the task of educating young people is particularly demanding and consuming of a person's spirit. [...]. Moreover, the structure of modern society, the pressures of institutional workplaces, and the conditions of the professional life of teaching are such that feelings of frustrations and failings are a constant concern. What teachers need to do is create conversational communities with others to be able to discuss and address experiences. Some of these communities spring up naturally in school staffrooms or even in hallways. Other conversational communities may need to be created purposefully in special designated times and spaces. (Van Manen, 1991, p. 82)

3 Creating Conversational Communities

When it comes to developing meaningful and purposeful practices of teacher education, an important goal is to stimulate a growing sense of ownership, responsibility, and agency among teacher educators, in other words, to contribute to the 'soft emancipation' of teacher educators (de Vries, 1990 in Biesta, 2020, p. 34). This can be done by fostering conversational communities of teacher educators as part of their processes of curriculum development. In such communities, curriculum development is approached as an ongoing process of purposefully and intentionally designing, putting into practice, evaluating, and redesigning educational experiences for student teachers. The communities provide a setting in which teacher educators can collaboratively engage in and reflect on curriculum development to further support the development of student teachers. They aim to provide a space where teacher educators can share their experiences; engage in constructive reflection on their judgements, decisions, and actions; and jointly deepen their understanding of the desirability and quality of the educational processes they provide.

Conversational communities provide a context that combines the three perspectives on research-based teacher education. Through conversations, teacher educators and community facilitators engage in collaborative research activities, including critical discussion of underlying assumptions, collection of data within daily practice and evaluation of – and reflection on – such data. Teacher educators act as role models for their student teachers, encouraging them to focus on research. This is especially the case when student teachers are given a voice in the conversations and reflections, e.g., through participatory action research (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Saldana & Omasta, 2022). The third perspective is visible when conversations are inspired and deepened by

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theory and models from earlier research and when research outcomes are used to design an evidence-based teacher education curriculum.

4 A Framework to Support Conversational Dialogue in Curriculum Development

Conversational communities can assist teacher educators with their ongoing task of providing 'good education' through the design and development of practices that are increasingly aligned with their aims. They support the translation of teacher educators' purposeful thoughts into purposeful actions by engaging them in a collaborative process of curriculum development.

While traditional approaches to curriculum design involve a linear one-way process from vision to aims to design and finally to action, conversational communities allow dialogue to work in both directions, as practical experiences can help to clarify aims or to formulate visions more precisely.

Building on previous work, in which we analysed several projects where educators and researchers had collaborated to strengthen the alignment between educational visions and lived experiences in schools (Modderkolk, 2022), we identify several purposeful acts that can be encouraged through dialogue in conversational communities:

- Intending: translating educational ideals into tangible goals and outcomes;
- Designing: designing lessons and educational experiences that will achieve the intended goals and outcomes;
- Practicing: putting the lessons and educational experiences that have been designed into practice in the form of encounters between educators and pupils or students;
- Evaluating: charting pupils' or students' results with regard to the lesson or educational experience, and connecting them to factors from the practice that led to such results, generating insights with regard to the present design that may have an impact on the design of future lessons and educational experiences;
- Reflecting in the light of intentions: exploring the extent to which the designed and delivered curriculum contributed to the intended goals and outcomes for pupils and students, and the way it did so, clarifying and rethinking explicit or implicit goals and outcomes;
- Contemplating: considering whether pupils' or students' results and what was designed and delivered through educational practices are aligned with educational ideals, and whether this necessitates reconsideration of such ideals.

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To emphasise the notion that this process has neither a fixed beginning nor definite end point, we used a horizontal lemniscate to illustrate these acts (see Figure 13.1). The lemniscate includes four key elements: visions (our underlying convictions about our purpose and our understanding of education), intentions (what we aim to bring about), design (how we organise and provide for this), and practice (what we do and what students learn). The six purposeful acts illustrate a process of going back and forth between vision, intentions, design, and practice, aiming to strengthen the alignment between these four key elements. Each of the four key elements can serve as a starting point for acts of critical but constructive and reflective dialogue aimed at developing purposeful designs and practices. For example, the process can be kicked off by 'painting' two pictures: a picture of the community's ideal vision and intentions and a more realistic depiction of the actual design and practices. Painting the first picture typically involves collecting and bringing together a broad range of perspectives and understandings of what is important and why, for instance through dialogue or debate. Painting the second picture is more straightforward and usually involves collecting and analysing a broad range of qualitative and quantitative data. This is followed by a critical, evaluative process to determine the extent to which what is intended matches and can be delivered through the actual design and practices, and on the other hand to determine how our experiences in practice can help to deepen, clarify, and change our vision and intentions. All in all, the process can help us understand what can be done to strengthen the alignment between our educational vision, our pedagogical intentions, and the goals of our curriculum – our ideals – and the actual interactions and experiences of our student teachers and teacher educators – our reality. These understandings are then used to sharpen our ideals and to redesign and implement changes in the everyday learning environment and in educational practices.

This lemniscate could support and guide teacher educator dialogue during the ongoing process of designing and refining curricula, providing a

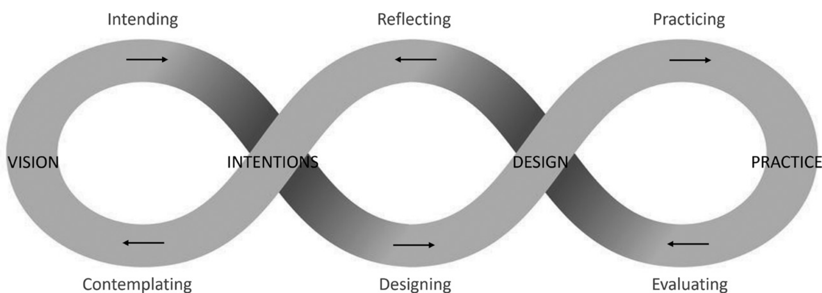

FIGURE 13.1 The conversational framework

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conversational framework (similarly to the way in which Laurillards' Conversational Framework fosters dialogue between teachers on the design of blended learning environments (Laurillard, 2002)). This would turn the process of teacher education curriculum design into an inspiring and practical combination of design research, self-study, collaborative action research and curriculum study by teacher educators.

Inspired by Van Manen's concept of conversational communities and the conversational framework, we created a conversational community in which we as researchers joined with two teacher educators who were designing and delivering part of a new experimental teacher education programme. Below, we describe and reflect on our experiences, focusing on the following key question:

> How does engagement in a conversational community and the use of the conversational framework help teacher educators engage in active inquiry and self-study within processes of curriculum design and refinement?

5 Research Design

We used a two-step educational design approach for this process (McKenney & Reeves, 2013). The first step consisted of designing the conversational community using the lemniscate-based framework. In the second part, we tested the conversational community with two teacher educators involved in curriculum innovation.

5.1 *Context*

The background to this case study is a collaborative curriculum innovation project in four teacher education institutions in the Netherlands, launched in 2020. The key focus of the project is to develop educational experiences for student teachers that foster a more comprehensive – or whole child – perspective on education and its purpose. 'Whole child education' can be defined as education that aims to engage all dimensions of human intelligence and development including the cognitive, social, moral, physical, creative, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (NIVOZ, 2018; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). The four teacher education institutions focus on developing a curriculum that fosters a 'whole teacher' perspective, taking a multi-dimensional approach both to the aims of the curriculum and to the methodology of educating teachers.

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The conversational community we created is located in one of these teacher education institutions. Within this institution, a process was initiated to develop a new teacher education programme that translated several aspects of the vision and its intentions regarding 'whole teacher education' into a new curriculum. After two years of preparation, formulating the vision, intentions and design, a pilot program was launched in the 2021–2022 academic year, covering a large part (40%) of the first year of a four year bachelor's programme for student teachers in secondary education. This pilot programme put several aspects of the vision and intentions of 'whole teacher education' into practice with a small group of eight student teachers, who were supported by two experienced teacher educators. The teacher educators were new to the innovation project, having not participated in the preparatory activities, and as a result they had to develop a sense of ownership in relation to vision, intentions, design and practice. In particular with regard to the latter two elements (design and practice), they had to put together specific interactions, tasks and activities and put them into practice. A conversational community was created to support them in this process, consisting of the two teacher educators and two teacher education researchers (first and second author). This community focused on one specific and innovative element of the pilot program: the aim of strengthening student teachers' agency by offering them opportunities for self-directed learning and active inquiry and by challenging them to develop that agency by taking collaborative responsibility for their learning process, the curriculum and assessment criteria.

Alongside the conversational community focusing on design and practice with regard to agency, the two teacher educators were also part of another design community focusing on the full four year program.

5.2 *Design of the Conversational Community*

For us, the conversational community had a double aim: (1) to support the two teacher educators with the development of the pilot program and with their practical engagement with students (with a focus on student agency); (2) to gain a better understanding how the conversational framework could support conversational communities and challenge teacher educators to engage in active inquiry and self-study within processes of curriculum design and refinement.

To achieve these two aims, we used a dialogic and interactive process, arranging four meetings of the conversational community across the year (in December 2021, March 2022, May 2022 and July 2022), in which we discussed insights gained with regard to vision, intentions, design and practical experience over the preceding period. We used a reflective document that the teacher educators were encouraged to use to record their reflections, both in preparation for

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meetings and in reflecting after each one. The document thus evolved throughout the year, with input from both teacher educators. In preparation for each meeting, the teacher educators were invited to record their joint insights from the preceding period and add these to the reflective document. The teacher educators' insights were thus captured in their own words. Insights were structured by means of leading questions focusing on the key elements of the lemniscate:
- General insights
- Vision & intentions: what does the 'agency of student teachers' mean to you?
- Design: what are the implications that follow from this understanding of student teacher agency for the design of the new program?
- Practice – teacher educators' perspective: what do teacher educators need this programme to include in order to help student teachers develop their agency, e.g. in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, materials, guidance?
- Practice – student teachers' perspective: to what extent do student teachers feel they have agency? To what extent do student teachers demonstrate agency? What do they need, e.g. in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, materials, guidance?

During the conversational community meetings, we discussed the insights of the teacher educators, drawing out how the insights of each of the key elements were related to each other, thus moving through the lemniscate and discussing the alignment or misalignment of the key elements.

After each meeting, the teacher educators added the insights from the meeting to the reflective document. The reflections of the teacher educators before and after the meetings were captured in the document using different colours. This allowed all members of the conversational community to see how insights developed over time.

Since our second focus was the way in which the conversational framework supported conversational communities and challenged teacher educators to engage in active inquiry and self-study within the process of curriculum development, at the end of the second, third and fourth meetings we also discussed the extent to which the conversational framework enhanced teacher educators' awareness.

5.3 *Data Collection and Analysis*

The reflective document was our main source of data when answering our key question. The second source of data was the four meetings of the conversational community, which were recorded for triangulation. These recordings were used when the reflective document was unclear.

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We analysed the reflective document that captured the teacher educators' reflections using a thematic coding technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994) with codes relating to the conversational framework. As the meetings and reflective document covered more themes than student agency, we first selected the parts of the document relating to agency. We added the teacher educators' reflections before and after each meeting. To strengthen the validity of the analysis, a third outside researcher (third author) assisted the two researchers who were members of the conversational community. The three researchers individually coded the reflective document, using the key elements of the lemniscate. During this process we used the audio recordings of the meetings to better understand the coded parts of the reflective document, and to check meanings. Afterwards, we discussed differences between coders in order to reach a shared understanding of codes and the interpretation of the data. Next, each individual researcher coded all relevant sections of the document for a second time. At this point, the coders reached 85% agreement and remaining differences were discussed and resolved. In a final step, the first author completed the analysis of the reflective document.

The analysis deployed three approaches. First, we analysed the teacher educators' reflections on the four key elements of the conversational framework by collecting all coded parts per key element and describing the content. Second, in order to understand how the teacher educators moved through the conversational framework, all parts of the reflective document (general insights, reflections on the four key elements) were plotted graphically over time. Finally, we mapped the teacher educators' reflections on the process by summarising their answers on the value added by using the conversational framework during the meeting.

6 Results

6.1 *Part 1: Reflections on the Key Elements of the Conversational Framework*

Our first analysis focused on the teacher educators' reflections on the four key elements of the conversational framework with regard to student teachers' agency.

6.1.1 Vision

In the reflective document, references to the vision were mainly formulated as questions about the underlying vision and did not provide explicit answers: "A vision of student agency: how do we build it and communicate it?" or "What

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does learning in a community mean to us: taking responsibility for each other's learning process?" (added in December). Later the teacher educators also clarified their underlying vision on student teacher agency, albeit in a very limited way: "We think this programme is suitable for all students seeking to develop and grow" (added in May).

The lack of an explicit vision could be explained by the fact that the two teacher educators were new to the project and had not participated in the preceding work of the design group that prepared the programme:

> The vision was formulated over the past two years by the design group. Our job in this pilot was only to deliver it. Because of this, the vision sounds rather abstract to us, i.e. quite difficult. We need to talk to members of the design group about it, and try and understand it for ourselves. (added in December)

However, they felt supported by the new design group that was preparing the new bachelor's programme, and considered the present programme as a pilot for the new programme: "In the design group we are discussing and formulating our vision. Our experiences in the pilot this year make it easy for us to contribute to that" (added in May). This remark shows how the vision of the teacher educators and of the design group preparing the full programme was inspired and enriched through practical experiences in the pilot program.

6.1.2 Intentions

The reflective document provided little insight in the intended outcomes of the programme with regard to student agency. As with the questions about vision, the remarks in the reflective document about intentions also took the form of reflective questions, and did not providing explicit answers to such questions: "What kind of agency do we expect student teachers to demonstrate when they start the programme, and do we expect them to develop during the programme?" (added in May). The limited way in which intentions were discussed in the reflective document could be explained in three ways. First, the two teacher educators were supported by the new design group preparing the new bachelor programme: as we learned in conversational community meetings, learning outcomes were also discussed and formulated during that group's sessions. It may be that they did not feel the need to revisit those discussions in the conversational community. Second, the learning outcomes of the pilot program were fixed on the basis of formal guidelines and there was not much room for the teacher educators to make independent choices. Third, the formal learning outcomes focused mainly on the knowledge and skills that

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students had to acquire with regard to pedagogy and education; they were not very explicit in terms of intentions or outcomes with regard to agency.

These last two elements created tensions: the detailed learning outcomes students had to achieve did not leave much room for students' agency. The teacher educators recognised the tension and had explicit views on how to formulate programme intentions for their students that would strengthen agency:

> We have to formulate rather general learning outcomes, students (and their coaches) have to formulate their own qualitative criteria and data points. Then there will be room for the student teachers to adapt the learning outcomes to their own needs and this will stimulate student teachers' awareness. (added in December)

As an example of generally formulated learning outcomes, they formulated one of the intended learning outcomes: "Student teachers have to be able to design critical, innovative and creative education for all their students, based on a strong personal and substantiated vision of education".

6.1.3 Design

In contrast to the limited references made to intended outcomes, the reflective document made extensive reference to programme design in relation to student agency. The first reflections in the document focused in rather general terms on design principles for the pilot programme, e.g. regarding the focus on whole child development: "We have to preach what we teach, see the whole student, their background and experiences, and give them space to explore and make their own mistakes". However, they related that to the implications for their own role and expertise: "We have to know what learning outcomes entail and have sufficient knowledge and theory to be flexible and to be able to answer students' questions and coach them" (added in December). Later on, often in response to observation of practice, they reflected increasingly explicitly on the consequences for the design of the pilot programme and the new bachelor's programme:

> When students feel lost, we have to be there to support them. The art of teaching is being there at the right time: not too early, not too late. Having sufficient time for coaching is crucial. This is also an important focus for the new Bachelor's programme. (added in March)

> It would be best to let them write their learner reports immediately at the end of their internship day. We always have to be there at that moment

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> to coach them when needed. They need time and space in their schedule that day to reflect on their experiences. (added in May)

6.1.4 Practice of Teacher Educators and Student Teachers

The reflective document, also includes extensive references to observations of behaviour and the benefits of the practice in the pilot programme with regard to student agency. Teacher educators reflected on their observations of student behaviour and on the benefits for the students: "Students tell us: we are allowed to make mistakes, and learn from them, we always have time to improve things. Students say that that makes them do the best they can. We see that students take responsibility for each other's learning, that students understand they have to give each other space and help each other to learn to do things they find difficult" (added in March).

They also reflected on students' progress:

> We have noticed during the year that students are becoming more able to define their own criteria. We see that students are more aware of what they have to learn, are familiar with the intentions and quality criteria, and are able to design their own tasks that require appropriate time and effort.

Subsequently the teacher educators also reflected on their own behaviour:

> How can we explain this change in students' behaviour? It is our open and supportive attitude, the joint process we developed for the feedback/feedforward process, the coaching sessions where we spent a lot of time on student input. And the developmental reflections: the second time we focused more on process than on product evaluation. They developed reflective skills very fast because we focused explicitly on that, using learner reports, coaching and developmental discussions. (added in March)

Their reflections on their own behaviour were also often critical: "We noticed that students had to do a lot of work in period 3, and hadn't planned very well. The question is: should we have given them more guidance, or do they need to make these mistakes in order to learn from them?" (added in May), or: "One group did better than the other when writing learner reports. This could have something to do with the types of students, but also with differences in our skills" (added in May).

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6.2 *Part 2: How the Teacher Educators Moved through the Conversational Framework*

The examples above demonstrate that the teacher educators were moving back and forth through the conversational framework.

Although the vision is sometimes rather implicit, it becomes more explicit through the design criteria they use: “They have to feel uncomfortable” – indicating that in their view learning processes often include dips and frustrations that students have to go through. At the same time this design criterion impacted on practice and on what they had to do as teacher educators:

> We have now done two exercises asking student teachers to define qualitative criteria for their products, and the second time it was a lot easier for the students. It was crucial to ask the right questions, we made the discomfort explicit and showed the students that we also try and make mistakes: practice what you preach.

These experiences provided input for reflection on the design of the program: “It is important to give students space and time to make their own choices (autonomy), foster good relationships between students (safety) and provide enough scaffolding when it is hard for students”. Over time these reflections were strengthened: “The first time students had to define qualitative criteria it was quite difficult. The third time it was a lot easier, students were better prepared. Maybe because they knew what was expected of them?” These insights also reflected the new full programme that was being developed: “So it is important that the new programme provides the time for these processes”.

The reflectIons of the teacher educators on the outcomes for students provide food for thought on design: “We see students developing a positive attitude towards developing themselves, in terms both of pedagogy and teaching techniques”. This reflection prompts thoughts about the way they coach students in this and the potential implications for the design of the programme: “We also notice that we don’t have enough time for coaching. It’s important that the new programme provides enough time”.

To understand how the teacher educators’ understanding of the curriculum developed while running the course, we illustrated their movement through the conversational framework by plotting their responses in the reflective document graphically over time. By way of example, Figure 13.2 shows how the teacher educators reflected on student practice over time.

This visualisation shows that the teacher educators mainly moved back and forth between practice and design, indicating that experiences in practice

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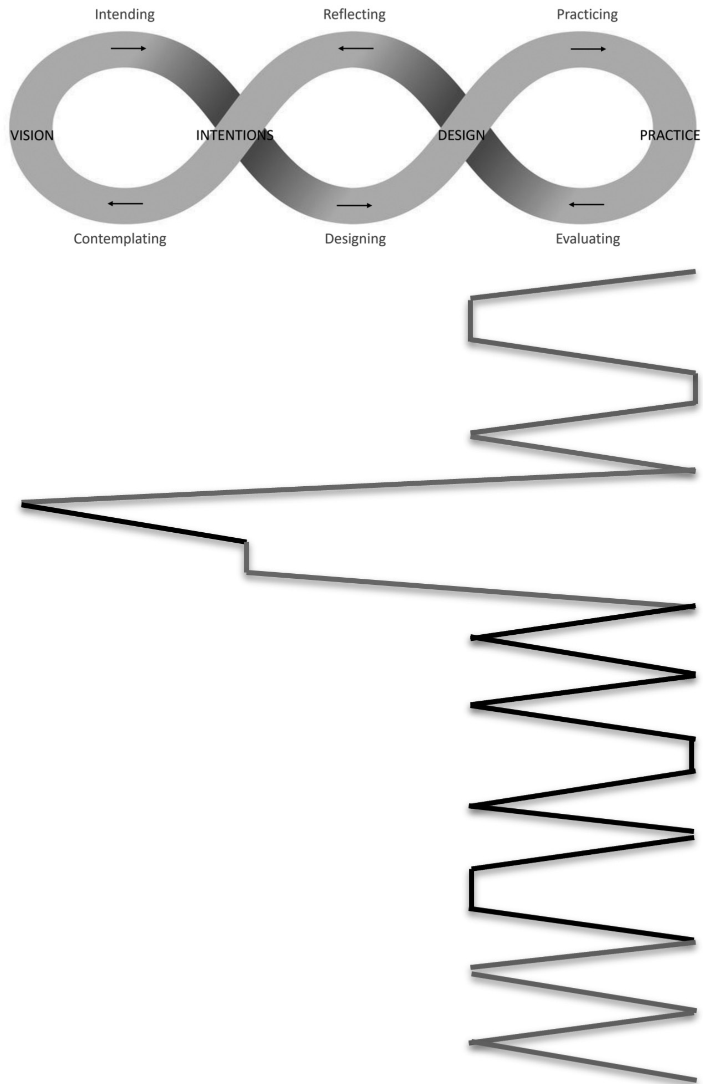

FIGURE 13.2 Visualisation of how teacher educators moved through the conversational framework when reflecting on the questions about student practice

provided input into the redesign of the program, but hardly any input into the rethinking of intentions or vision.

6.3 *Part 3: Teacher Educators' Reflections on the Process*

To answer the main research question 'How does a conversational community and the conversational framework help teacher educators to engage in active

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inquiry and self-study within curriculum design and refinement processes?' we summarised the reflections of the teacher educators during the conversational community meetings on the value added by the conversational framework.

During the meetings the teacher educators reported that they considered the meetings useful and meaningful:

> It is meaningful to talk to people who are engaged, but also outsiders. The conversation is at a more abstract level then I am used to. It helps me to think things through, and I don't have to find out everything myself. Besides that, the meetings give me time and space to take a step back, to make explicit what I do and why I do it. To be asked critical questions about our practice experiences helps us to reflect on what we do and which steps to take.

The final questions of each meeting focused on the conversational framework, its goal and the key elements. During the meetings, the teacher educators became more aware of the distinction between the key elements:

> Sometimes I think it is difficult to distinguish between vision and intentions, or intentions and design. To me they are so interrelated that it is hard to distinguish them. But it helps me to realise that I use all four of them though I'm not always aware of them. I know that the lemniscate is in my head, but it's more or less implicit. I think I often refine my vision and intentions without being aware of it; I'm more focused on design and what I learn from practice.

They clearly see the added value of the conversational framework:

> We often talk about content, but the lemniscate urges us to explain all the aspects, especially our vision and intentions. We don't talk often about vision and what exactly we mean by the concepts in our vision. It is very useful to move back and forth through the lemniscate, refining our vision. And asking each other: Why do we do it? Why do we do it this way?

At the end of the final meeting one of the teacher educators asked: "I wonder how the two of us differ in how we use the elements of the lemniscate. I think I often start by designing, doing practical things. What about you?" The other teacher educator answered: "Yes, we are different. I like to start with the vision: What do I think is important? I'm now more aware that it's very valuable to

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collaborate with someone who starts at the other end: you both learn, you ask more questions, you complement each other". So by discussing the conversational framework, the teacher educators became aware that they had different styles of working, and that working with someone who had a different style added value because it required them to make their way of thinking explicit, and to ask each other about the key elements.

7 Conclusions and Discussion

In this case study we focused on a conversational community of two teacher educators and two researchers with regard to the implementation of a pilot program one of whose aims was to strengthen the agency of first year student teachers. The aim of the study was to explore and understand how a conversational community could support the process of curriculum development and the alignment of vision, intentions, design and practice. To structure reflections and responses within the conversational community, we used a conversational framework focusing on the alignment of these four elements. The study showed how such a framework can help teacher educators make their curriculum choices, experiences and reflections more explicit.

The initial analysis of the data showed that the teacher educators lacked an explicit underlying vision for the pilot program e.g. what exactly they understood by 'agency', reflecting the fact that the teacher educators had not been involved in the preparation and design of the pilot program and were new to it. Although the program itself had clear intentions in the form of learning outcomes that student teachers had to master, the lack of a clear vision for student agency also resulted in a lack of clarity about expectations with regard to the development of agency. However, based on their previous experiences the teacher educators had clear ideas on how to foster and support student agency, both through designing a learning environment that challenged and helped student teachers to develop their agency and through supporting that agency in practice.

The second analysis, which looked at how the teacher educators moved through the different parts of the conversational framework, showed that they tended to focus their reflective dialogue on the key elements of design and practice. As such, practical experience of encounters with students served as important prompts for teachers to engage in reflections on the design of the programme. During the year, the reflections became more and more concrete and explicit as the teacher educators gained experience and confidence within the

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pilot program. However, reflections on vision and intentions remained somewhat implicit. These finding show that – at least for these teacher educators – daily practice is focused on their engagement with students. The experiences of this engagement are catalysts for reflection on the design, but do not necessarily lead to explicit reflection on intentions and vision.

Our assumption was that a conversational framework could support the teacher educators' reflections on the alignment between the four key elements of the curriculum process. The conversational framework was used during the meetings to guide their thinking. Although the second analysis showed that this use of the framework led only to a limited extent to explicit reflection on the first two key elements (vision and intentions), the teacher educators were positive about the value added by the framework and the conversational community. It helped enhance their awareness of the implicit elements in their thinking and of the unconscious choices they were making in designing the curriculum and in their work with students, and it made them aware of their preferred approach to curriculum development and elements that could be added to enrich that approach. The meetings of the conversational community forced them to interrupt their daily work and the conversational framework helped them to make clearer separations between the four key elements; this enabled them to formulate their reflections, questions and answers more precisely.

It also showed that teacher educators might have different preferences regarding the different key elements of the conversational framework as starting points for reflection. This indicates that it might be useful – when working with teams of teacher educators – to set up teams so that they consist of teacher educators with different preferences to enable them to benefit from a range of perspectives.

8 Final Reflections

In the introduction to this chapter, we identified three ways research can play a role within teacher education. The first way identified a new role for teacher educators as researchers, without necessarily connecting the roles of educator and researcher. The second way involved teacher educators focusing on their student teachers and their inquiring mindsets, emphasising their role as educators of student teachers, without necessarily connecting with inquiring mindsets on the part of teacher educators themselves. The third way focused on teacher educators as users of the body of knowledge that stems for research

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outcomes, emphasising the role of teacher educators as designers of curricula and educators of teachers and not necessarily highlighting their role as researchers themselves and as contributors to that body of knowledge.

This chapter explored a fourth way of understanding research based teacher education, in which an inquiring attitude on the part of teacher educators as active and reflexive agents is crucial, stimulating critical reflection on their thoughts, judgements and decisions and on the resulting alignment between vision, intention, design and practice within teacher education. This critical reflection is necessary to make intentions and design choices more explicit and at the same time to support systematic reflection on teacher education practices, which in turn can help to sharpen intentions and visions. By making choices and reflections more explicit, teacher educators' agency and the alignment of curricula can be strengthened, and at the same time teacher educators can contribute to the development of a body of knowledge that is based on the one hand on theory and concepts and on the other on practical experience and reflection.

However, this case study with two teacher educators running a new pilot programme shows that that critical reflection cannot be taken for granted and that such critical reflection might benefit from reflective conversations within a conversational community and from the use of a conversational framework. Such a framework can help teacher educators find opportunities for interruption, suspension and sustenance (Biesta, 2017) in their daily work. Creating a conversational community and using the conversational framework supports teacher educators and prompts them to take time to make implicit choices explicit and to connect purpose and practice within their curriculum.

We assumed that a conversational community supported by the use of the conversational framework might promote stronger integration between the practice of educating teachers and research, by combining elements of design research, self-study, collaborative action research and curriculum study. However, although the teacher educators appreciated the lemniscate, It only fostered more explicit reflection on vision and intentions to a limited extent. The teacher educators made active use of two sources for learning as identified by Koffeman (2021): their own practical experiences and exchange with colleagues. The third source – learning from theory – was not mentioned during the meetings and in the reflective document: no references were made to theories, concepts or research outcomes, thought these might have helped them formulate answers to the questions they raised regarding aspects of their vision. This demonstrates that for many teacher educators there is still a gap between practice and research.

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It also demonstrates that as researchers, we are still coming up against the gap between research and practice and have actually kept that gap in place. Looking back at the process we created and went through, we realise that while creating a conversational community, we still thought in term of 'us' (researchers) and 'them' (teacher educators). We were curious about their ideas and thoughts and tried to help them to make these explicit by providing a conversational framework. However, we created a separation during the meetings, resulting from the implicit distinction between 'interviewers' and 'interviewees'. The result was that we did not provide the teacher educators with the theory and concepts relating to agency and self-directed learning that might have helped them make their vision more explicit. We did not consider ourselves as members of the pilot team with responsibility for contributing more directly to the alignment between the key elements in curriculum development, but rather as observers and facilitators of the process.

For us as researchers, that awareness provides new insight and challenge regarding the connection between research and practice in teacher education. The challenge is what balance our role as researchers should strike: are we critical friends – keeping a distance between researchers and teacher educators – or partners in the process of curriculum development?

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