BEGINNING STUDENT TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY[1]

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Abstract: This article investigates teachers' professional identity of beginning first-year students through their beliefs about being a teacher. The presented study focuses on Austrian teacher students' (N=18) conceptions of becoming a professional; what convictions student teachers reflect on, which professional identity emerges and what synthesis of a professional teacher identity position can be portrayed at the beginning of teacher education. Through inductively driven content analysis all statements (N=401) have been combined, and a unified synthesis of a beginning student teachers' professional identity was formed. Three main categories were found: the "ideal" teacher, "good" teaching, and the "optimal" working environment. The results showed a highly idealistic view of being a teacher. The majority of statements referred to teaching from a pupil-centered perspective by strongly emphasising personality traits, student-teacher relationships, and teachers' professional knowledge. Based on the results, the role of professional identity in Austrian's teacher education is discussed, and further implementations in research are recommended.

Key words: Teacher identity, teachers' professional identity, beliefs about teaching, teachers' professional development, beginning student teachers, teacher education

1. Introduction

Research on teachers' professional identity has gained considerable attention during the past two decades, and has established itself as an independent approach. Multiple scholars highlight the importance of professional identity development in pre- and in-service teachers (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard & Meijer, 2017; Hong, Cross, & Schutz, 2018, Nickel & Zimmer, 2018, Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018). Both groups undergo individual developmental processes throughout a teacher's career; and especially teacher education plays a pivotal role in the early development of a teacher. This growing interest in professional identity development aligns with the increasing emphasis on the role of beliefs, emotions, passion, commitment, motivation, and agency. Teachers' professional identity has been linked to tensions between personal beliefs and social demands (Pillen, Beijaard, & den Brok, 2013), emotional and motivational aspects (Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018), the notion of one's self, and sense-making of one's work (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017). It is considered to be an important factor in understanding the conceptions about a teacher's role, the choice of teaching methods, and the actions teachers choose in their professional life (Hong et al., 2018).

Previous studies have shown that at the beginning of teacher education, student teachers' professional identity includes a large number of strong beliefs about the work of a teacher. Inevitable, these beliefs are strongly influenced by their previous educational experiences. For example, Lamote and Engels (2010) state, that at the beginning of teacher education students follow a strong pupil-orientated approach to teaching. Student-centered activities and personal development of the pupils were highlighted. Maaranen, Pitkäniemi, Stenberg, and Karlsson (2016) indicate that pre-service teachers have strong idealistic notions of a "good" teacher, "good" teaching, and a "good" teaching environment. Morally high values, classroom justice, high aims, and the best interest of the child are mentioned as core values of beginning student teachers. While such idealistic beliefs are desirable

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throughout the whole career of a teacher, the real situation of pupils and their social environment, school, community, educational institutions, and broader stakeholder groups might be different. As a result, a discourse arises between personal beliefs about the qualities and methods of a "good teacher" and other stakeholders. Previous research has shown that such dispositions can lead to different paths of becoming a teacher. Ideally, personal knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values are integrated and changed through professional demands from teacher education, institutes, and schools including broadly accepted values and standards (Pillen et al., 2013). In contrast, studies also indicate that student teachers' may resist such change in teacher education; perceived beliefs about the profession can be so strong, that new information is ignored during initial teacher training (Richardson, 1996).

This article investigates teachers' professional identity of 18 first-year student teachers in Austrian teacher education at the beginning of their studies. For this purpose, beliefs about being a teacher, teaching, and the work of a teacher are used as a lens for outlining teachers' professional identity. The author claims that teacher educators and student teachers should be aware of the developmental processes which occur during teacher training to foster an effective and meaningful professional development throughout the path of becoming a teacher (Stenberg, Karlsson, Pitkaniemi, & Maaranen, 2014). In addition to that, the author highlights the importance of a reflective practice based on professional identity development to support student teachers' growth during pre-service teacher education.

The objective of this study is to determine teachers' professional identity of first year pre-service teachers at the beginning of their teacher education. Therefore, I pose two research questions:

1. What beliefs about a teachers' professional identity do student teachers reflect on at the beginning of their teacher education?

2. What synthesis of a professional teacher identity position is emphasised in student teachers' beliefs at the beginning of teacher education?

2. Theoretical background

2. 1. Teachers' professional identity

Over the past two decades researchers have found the concept of teachers' professional identity attractive for research on teacher education, consequently "there is a growing recognition that teacher education and professional development programs must not only address subject-matter content and pedagogy, but also the complex processes involved" (Kaplan & Garner, 2018, p. 71). However, a growing and diverse literature lead to multiple definitions of the professional identity concept; it remains difficult to build a solid theoretical framework around the idea (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). "Identity" itself is defined as a multidimensional and dynamic construct with different shapes based on different theoretical lenses through one observes it. Different disciplinary perspectives, such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, neuroscience, and sociology have provided insight that identity can be approached from various viewpoints (Richardson & Watt, 2018). For example, Smith and Sparkes (2008) differentiate between four different identity perspectives: a socio-psychological approach (focusing on the inner self), an intersubjective approach (focusing on the individual and the social), a storied resource perspective (focusing on the social and cultural) and a dialogical approach (focusing on the discourses between individual, social and cultural). Current trends discuss teachers' professional identity mainly from a postmodern viewpoint based on Mead's (1934) work of the "self" in relation to society (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), Goffman's (1972) ideas about role identity (Pauw, Jongstra, & van Lint, 2016) and Erikson's (1980) understanding of identity as an ongoing process (Cote & Levine, 2014). Most researchers distinguish personal, social, and I-Identities. Personal Identity refers to an individual's biopsychosocial context - one's personality, interests, and characteristics. Social identity is seen as the socio-cultural context and is defined as an internalised understanding of how to be seen through others and what societal expectations one encounters. The I-Identity represents the comprehensive organisation and regulates contradictions between the different social identities and personal identity.

This article also approaches teacher identity formation from a postmodern perspective. Teachers' professional identity is considered to be an ongoing developmental process through reflection and interpretation of experiences through narrations and beliefs (Søreide, 2006). It includes both person and context; consists of multiple identities and sub-identities, which do not have to be in harmony with each other and comprises agency, ownership, and sense-making (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard & Meijer, 2017; Pillen et al., 2013).

2.2. A holistic perspective of being a teacher

Teacher education in (Upper) Austria is based on the following fundamental principles: First, it is competence-orientated following classical ideas as content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge. Second, the curriculum draws attention to biographical and developmental processes. Students should be aware of their own biographically developed beliefs, values, and behavior concerning teaching and the work of a teacher. Third, teacher education in (Upper) Austria is practice-orientated and reflexive. Teaching practice and theoretical coursework are strongly linked, reflective practice based on experiences and theories is emphasised. Forth, teacher education is research-based. Current trends in educational research are discussed, and students should develop a research-based teaching attitude. Last, teacher training is transdisciplinary. Students are encouraged to look beyond their subject and acknowledge education as a lifelong process not limited to educational institutions. (Altrichter, Greiner, Soukup-Altrichter, & Reitinger, 2015).

Based on the foundations of the above-mentioned principles the author argues, that teacher education in (Upper) Austria includes (next to its competence orientation) social and affective domains of becoming a teacher portraying teacher education as a holistic entity addressing all qualities of a "good" teacher. Besides the classical competence-view of a teacher, it emphasises the teacher's self, draws attention to the cognitive and affective aspects of being a teacher, and promotes agency and reflection through teaching practice in diverse social environments.

In this study, the aothor approaches teachers' professional identity as such a holistic concept. It "can be defined as a resource that people use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large and can be considered a basis for answering teachers' questions such as "how to be", "how to act" and "how to understand teaching."" (Assen, Koops, Meijers, Otting, & Poell, 2018, p. 131). A useful framework within which to consider a holistic understanding of being a teacher is Korthagen's (2016) onion model (see Figure 1). The onion model is typically illustrating an effective professional teacher throughout different layers, which are codependent.
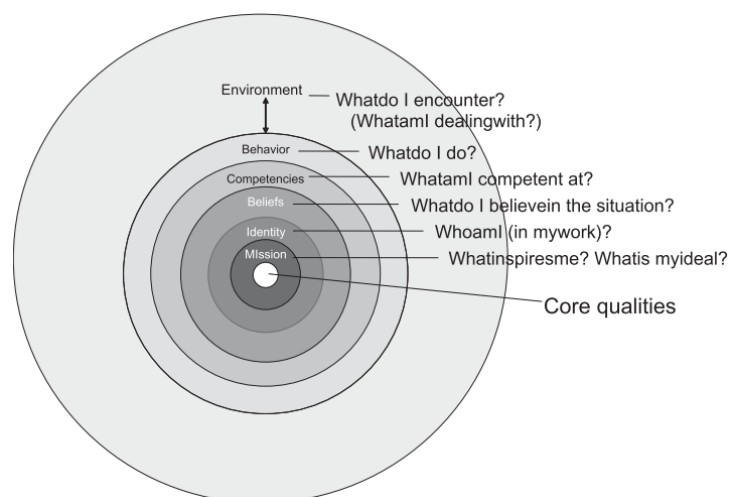

Figure 1. *The onion model (model of levels in reflection) (Korthagen, 2016, p. 9)*

Core qualities (personality traits and character strengths), ideals and mission (motivation and significance), identity, beliefs, competencies, behaviour (ability to act), and environmental influences. Inner and outer layers can influence each other; yet, it is not possible to skip a layer. For example,

environmental settings demand behaviour and actions that require specific competencies, resulting in a change of beliefs forming a professional identity. At the same time, core qualities and mission form identity, which is expressed through beliefs, thereby adapting competencies leading to specific behaviours influencing the environment (Korthagen, 2016). This study focuses on the dependency of two layers of the onion model while acknowledging a holistic perspective of becoming a teacher: Teachers' professional identity and teachers' beliefs.

2.3. Teacher identity and beliefs

While there are multiple approaches to understanding teachers' professional identity, this paper focuses on three main aspects linked to Korthagen's (2016) onion model (see Figure 1). First, building from the previous section, teachers' beliefs can be identified as a lens for understanding teachers' professional identity (Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2014). Second, the importance of discourse, narration, and context is pivotal in the construction of identity (Søreide, 2006) and third, identity development is enriched through active reflection on beliefs, discourse, and the context in which the subject is located (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teacher's professional identity is therefore in connection with both reflected beliefs and attitudes about teaching and being a teacher as well as in the described context through narrations, in which the subject is located.

The first aspect of teacher identity formation is teachers' beliefs. Zembylas and Chubbuck (2014) discuss emotions, narrations, discourse, reflection, and agency as key-factors for understanding teachers' identity formation and state, that identity and beliefs are strongly intertwined: Similar to understanding identity, beliefs are connected to the past, present, and future. Convictions are continuously discussed, and conflicts, difficulties, and tensions are an integral part of the development process. In addition to that, the context of reflection on ones' personal and professional understanding of being a teacher is crucial. Korthagen (2004) noted that beliefs of teachers have a direct influence on teaching behaviour and that vice versa reflecting on this behaviour directly influences those beliefs and attitudes. Throughout current literature student teachers' beliefs about "Who am I as a Teacher?" (Lerseth, 2013), "What is my role as a teacher?" (Cheung, 2008) and "What is good teaching and a good teacher?" (Maaranen et al., 2016) have been used to outline teachers' professional identity.

The narrative aspect of teacher identity derives from the socio-cultural orientation emphasising the multiplicity, discontinuity, and social nature of teachers' professional identity linking beliefs and perceptions to experiences (Søreide, 2006). Discourse constitutes teachers' professional identity through talking within and among others; the narration itself is seen as a manifestation of discourse in the teacher or his or her social context in which he or she is located (Cohen, 2010; Søreide, 2006). Watson (2006) describes identity formation as dialogically relational. Teachers put themselves in relation to peers, teacher educators, discourses of programs, schools, and politics.

Last, the aspect of reflection in teachers' professional identity formation is discussed. Zembylas and Chubbuck (2018) state three emerging themes in terms of identity formation: First, reflection on teachers' professional identity formation is enriched by conflicts and discomfort; a dissonance between personal and social identity can provoke a positive development (Pillen et al., 2013). Second, identity is created by reflecting on one's career or past experiences, prior concepts of personal identity, and the resulting future perspectives (Smith, 2007). Third, if the context of action is interpreted through reflection, the development of professional identity is influenced.

3. Research and Methods

3.1. Context of the study

The study is carried out at the institute of secondary education at the University of Education Upper Austria, Linz, Austria. The author is part of the cross-institutional department of educational sciences. All teacher educators in this department are required to conduct research, hold a doctoral degree, or function as doctoral candidates. Austrian teacher education is research-based and student teachers graduate with a Master's degree. The four basic foundations of the teacher education program consists of studies about content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, educational sciences, and pedagogical-

practical studies. The Bachelor's program for secondary education generally requires 240 ECTS credits, which are followed by a Master's program of 60 ECTS credits (vocational education) or 120 ECTS credits (general secondary education). Student teachers must complete the Master's degree within five years after their Bachelor's degree to be able to enter into a permanent teaching contract. In addition, student teachers have to go through a one-year induction phase in which they teach regularly and are accompanied by mentors. They can complete this work experience directly after their Bachelor's degree and have it recognised as an internship for the Master's degree. One needs to mention that the Austrian teacher education system was recently reformed (PädagogInnenbildung "NEU"). Before 2016/17 primary and lower secondary school teachers required a Bachelor's degree; upper secondary school teachers were required to hold a Master's degree.

3.2 Participants

All together 18 student teachers participated in the first round of the study. The responding participants are enrolled in secondary teacher education and will be all graduating to teach different subjects (pupils of 10 to 18 years). All major subjects (Mathematics, German, English) and almost all minor subjects were represented (except Music, Informatics, and Chemistry). One-third of the participants were men (N=6) and two-thirds women (N=12). It can be argued, that this balance aligns with the overall representation of gender in the whole teaching program (~ 30% male, ~ 70% female; BMBF, 2020). Other genders are not officially registered at all, none of the participants identified themselves as gender-fluid, divers or other. The student teachers were all first semester students at the beginning of their studies and were invited to participate via e-mail; the data collection process was not integrated into a course or a seminar. The students had no formal teacher education before, nor have they been working in practica related to the teacher education program.

3.3 Data Collection

The research data was collected in the autumn of 2017 and represents the first out of five planned rounds of interviews. Data sets were not only collected for longitudinal research purposes, but also the evaluation of the newly implemented teacher education program "Pädagoginnenbildung NEU" in Austria. The qualitative questionnaire was designed to generate narrations through impulses about student teachers' beliefs, "good" teaching and being a "good" teacher. The chosen form of episodic-narrative interviews aims to generate theories about a phenomenon through stories and includes features from different approaches like narrative inquiry, semistructured interview, and episodic interview (Flick, 2011). Therefore, the chosen structure does not just provide insights about personal beliefs, but allows the student teachers to reflect on different viewpoints about being a teacher. Throughout narrations, different real-life situations and subjective definitions are discussed and argumentative reliable statements are formed. In addition to the prepared impulses, ad-hoc questions triggered the reflection process of student teachers by calling their thinking into question. Space was given to explain and elaborate on the mentioned statements by putting them in different contexts.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data was transcribed based on its content and analysed through computer-assisted data-driven content analysis (Mayring, 2015). The software used was MAXQDA. While an overall coding scheme was formed based on previous studies (main categories), the sub- and generic categories where inductively chosen without a specific framework. First, the statements have been read by the author; second, subcodes were coded and compared; and third, discussed later on with other researchers. As a forth step, all code-segments were unified into one combined matrix. Fifth, each code-segment was placed into a fitting subcategory. As the last step, all sub-categories were organised based on similarities through forming generic categories. Finally, the generic categories were divided into the main categories. The data analysis focused on student teachers' beliefs about "good" teaching and a "good" teacher determining their overall identity position (Maaranen et al., 2016).

4. Results of the study

4.1. Perceptions of an "ideal" teacher

Table 1. *Student teachers' beliefs about being a good teacher (252 Statements)*

Teachers' characteristics (111)	**e.g.** being empathic (6), stay motivated (6), to be human (5), to be open (5), to show interest in one's subject (5), to be strict (5), to emphasise the importance of the subject (4), to care about students(4), to have an idealistic mindset (3), to be respectful (3), to be motivational (3), to be a role model (3), to be patient (3), to be thrilling (3)
Teachers' knowledge (93)	**e.g.** to have content knowledge (6), to match the needs of the class (5), To transfer knowledge (4), to foster group dynamics (4), to react to questions (4), to plan lessons (4), to behave like a professional (4), to provide systematically planned lessons (4), to give clear instructions (3), to increase knowledge (3)
Teacher-student relationship (48)	**e.g.** to find a balance between authority and caregiver (10), to keep emotional distance (3), to be respectful towards each other (3), to trust each other (3), to facilitate of becoming an adult (3), to be responsive towards being a human (3), to treat students like adults (2), to have a friendship (2)

The category *"ideal" Teacher* comprises 252 statements, 87 sub-categories, and three generic categories (see Table 1); the numbers in brackets indicate the number of statements in the category. Throughout a narrative impulse (How would you describe a good teacher?) three main generic categories were found. The most highlighted generic category was *teachers' characteristics* (111) in which student teachers described the personality traits of a good teacher. Statements in this section outline how to be a teacher and contain mainly adjectives. The second-largest generic category consisted of statements relating to *teachers' knowledge* (93). Student teachers described what one has to know as a good teacher. Statements in this category refer to what knowledge is necessary to be successful as a teacher. The third and hierarchical last generic category, *teacher-student relationship* (48) consists of statements representing on how to interact with pupils. The vast amount of assertions in this section describe tensions and dispositions about emotional distance and authority. The following three examples from student teachers illustrate their beliefs about being a good teacher:

> *"Good teaching is when it is varied, not always the same. When the teacher, is motivated, comes to the school with energy, with enthusiasm, and if he manages to keep up his enthusiasm. If he manages to stimulate that interest in the pupils. That the pupils think about it, that the pupils talk about it, that it's not over with the end of the lesson, but that the pupils afterward think about it as well Yes."*

(Student teacher 1, Teachers' characteristics, stay motivated)

> *"I believe that this is also very important in teacher training, that those personalities are competent in terms of content, but still have a great personality. And that is something very important for me, I was mostly impressed by teachers who were good in terms of content, because I felt nothing was worse than a student asking a question and then you realise that the teacher either doesn't know the answer, or gives an answer that doesn't fit the question at all."*

(Student teacher 6, Teachers' knowledge, to have content knowledge)

> *"We have been told that we should really take care, especially at the beginning, to keep a certain distance so that we don't crack in our first years of practice as young teachers. Because we can't solve all problems, we can't make every pupil into a perfect one, because you might meet some children where you reach your limits. And if you lack the appropriate experience, then it can quickly lead to unhappiness in your job. And we have been warned that we should rather lower expectations, try to do small steps, and also draw limits if necessary."*

(Student teacher 6, Teacher-student relationship, to find a balance between authority and caregiver)

4.2. Concepts of "good" teaching

Table 2. *Student teachers' beliefs about good teaching (118 Statements)*

Teachers' actions (64)	e.g. differentiation (8), to balance between curriculum requirements and students' personal interests (5), to base teaching on everyday problems (4), to ensure knowledge transfer (4), to balance if grades are necessary (3), to provide student-centered topics (3), to focus on the overall development (3), the curriculum is incidental (3), diversified lesson planning (2),
Learning environment (54)	e.g. room for different teaching methods (3), should generate interests (3); adequate furnishings (3), should support new media (3), independent working environment (2), rich in variety (2), room for discussions (2), supportive environment (2), should be familiar (2), supports self- determination (2), true-to-life (2), a place for education and nurturing (2)

The category *"good" teaching* consists of 115 statements, 62 sub-categories, and is organised into two generic categories: *teachers' actions* and *learning environment* (see Table 2). The narrative impulse (How would you describe good teaching?) generates statements on how to act as a teacher and how learning environments should be designed. The first generic category *"good" teaching* (32) comprises statements about the teaching process itself and the actions teachers take while working with students. The largest sub-category mentioned is differentiation. Tensions and dispositions about curriculum requirements and interests of students were discussed. The second generic category is *learning environment* (26). Student teachers describe their "ideal" learning environments in which pupils would benefit most. The following two quotes represent statements placed in both generic categories:

"Especially as a teacher, I think that one of the most important qualities is that you are somehow adaptable. That you can deal with each class differently, and that you can somehow respond to the class. In the end, the teacher is there for the class and not the class for the teacher... I have to look first if it fits the pupils sitting in the class.

(Student teacher 2, Teachers' actions, differentiation)

"I definitely think that you should try to make sure that you have a variety of methods. When you realise that it is not possible to teach, use some loosening up exercises that you can think of, if you realise that the pupils are very tense, if there was just something going on, then you do something completely different for five minutes, and then teaching might be possible again. That you have the flexibility to react properly and richness of methods is also good for good teaching."

(Student teacher 4, learning environment, room for different teaching methods)

4.3. Beliefs about an "optimal" working environment

Table 3. *Student teachers' beliefs about their future working environment (31 Statements)*

Working environment (31)	e.g. should provide autonomy (5), clear statements of specific preferred schools (5), awareness about the political impact on educational environments (3), should be a pleasant environment (3), should provide practical workspaces for students (2), enough teaching material (2), no grading system (2), negative reputation of the teaching profession (2)

The last main category *"optimal" working environment* includes 31 statements, 12 sub-categories (see Table 3) and refers to the question: How would you describe your future working environment? The largest sub-category contains concrete issues about the working environment as a place of autonomy (5). In addition to that, student teachers state clear ideas, e.g. the exact school and city, about their future workplaces (5). Being autonomous in teaching, choosing freely where to teach, and enough

teaching materials are the main common dominators of this category. The following statements outline student teachers ideas of a good working environment:

> *"I think that the new modular upper secondary school, which is now being introduced, is not so good either, because it takes away some of the teachers' freedom. Therefore, I think that it is important that every teacher decides for himself, on how he wants to teach, how I want to work with the students. What do I want to teach them specifically in this lesson and what do I want to teach them differently in another lesson!"*

(Student teacher 1, Working environment, should provide autonomy)

> *"Okay. In ten years from now, I will be working a couple of years. Well, I think that I will get into a gymnasium with my subjects. Therefore, I see myself in a gymnasium, whether in an upper or lower secondary school; I do not care, because I think I do well in both."*

(Student teacher 12, working environment, Clear statement of specific preferred schools)

4.3. Portraying a synthesis of beginning student teachers professional identity

Teachers' professional identity is displayed through beliefs and attitudes about teaching and being a teacher (Korthagen, 2016; Maaranen et al., 2016), as well as in the described context through narrations in which the subject is located (Søreide, 2006). The following paragraphs summarise the ontological beliefs about the role of teachers, personality, acting, and epistemological beliefs about one's knowledge related to the profession portraying beginning student teachers' professional identity.

The generic category *Teachers' characteristics* contains ideas about characteristics and personality traits and deals mostly with statements concerning interpersonal level between student and teacher. While student teachers acknowledge, that teachers do not have to be perfect, clear statements about necessary characteristics are formed. Teachers are referred to as central role models for pupils. They are described as motivating and empathic, act virtuously, and present themselves as human beings. Flexibility and openness are emphasised. Teachers intend to be sensitive and inspiring; all students should feel welcome, and mistakes should be tolerated. A teacher does not scare and torture students, but acts in a friendly, generous manner and takes things with humour. He or she should meet the students on the same level, but also be strict and assertive. A respectful and appreciated way of teaching pupils is emphasised. Wishes should be taken into consideration and not everything shall be taken too seriously. A teacher must be interested in his students and should recognise them as adults in upper secondary school. He or she represents a balance between professional competence and a good personality. A teacher intends to be idealistic and accepts criticism. An interest in one's subject is considered essential; he or she should be passionate about his or her subject, work goal-oriented, and have a profound rhetorical education.

Teachers' knowledge categorises statements referring to the epistemological beliefs about one's knowledge related to the teaching profession. A teacher should be able to stimulate the interest of the pupils and acts as an inspring person. Therefore, he or she provides adequate learning materials. A certain freedom in lessons must be guaranteed, discussions should be feciliated. The teacher intends to help the pupils to understand the material better and sets instructions and goals. A clear structure and systematic lesson planning are emphasised. The learning success is guaranteed by using different teaching methods and by repeating the content. Teachers generally support the students on their path of life, teach certain values, and take care of the students. A teacher is a master in his or her subject, professional competence is explicitly emphasised, there is nothing worse than a teacher who does not know his way around. This expertise should be combined with real-life examples working through practical examples; one must be able to explain why the subject is important later on. At the same time, it is criticised that you have to attend so many theoretical lectures which are not needed in ones' teaching. In addition to that, teachers should be technically talented and use new media in a meaningful way. Diverse working environments are considered challenging, conflicts and difficult situations in the classroom must be recognised early and dealt with correctly. A general overview must be kept. A teacher should pay attention every student equally.

Teacher-student relationship, as a generic category, describes perceptions of the role of a teacher in the classroom and the relationship between teachers and pupils. The school, in general is acknowledged as a social space, teacher-student relationships are emphasised as particularly important. The teacher should support the pupils as they grow up, build trust, and be a caregiver. Through a good relationship, knowledge is better retained. Nothing should be forced, mistakes must be allowed. A respectful relationship is maintained and on secondary school level students should be treated like adults who are allowed to participate in the decision making process on the same level as the teacher. However, teachers should not become the best friend, but only support and guide. It is important to draw a line, but also to be liked. A certain distance is necessary in order not to shatter emotionally as a teacher. A teacher can not solve all problems and will reach his or her limits. However, taking action and being consequent is vital. In contradiction, too much authority and distance are considered to be prejudicial towards the learning success and leads to paternalism. Fears of not being taken seriously or not getting respect are discussed. A balance between those aspects is emphasised as important.

The generic category *Teachers' actions* consist of beliefs about the teaching process itself. Teachers are considered to be able to adapt and respond to the wishes of the class. The different interests and levels of the pupils should be taken into account through individually designed lessons. At the same time, ability streaming is mentioned. Teachers should facilitate discussions, work project-orientated, and let students actively participate. Teacher centered teaching is not recommended, practical and life-oriented lessons are emphasized. A common thread in teaching is considered particularly important; group management and knowledge output must be kept in mind. "Good" pupils should support "bad" ones. Content must be repeated frequently, a diverse range of learning materials and worksheets should be available, and homework exercises are necessary. However, there should be no exams. Grades are described as important on the one hand, but alternative grading systems are discussed.

While the previous categories focused on the teacher, pupils, and on (inter)actions, *Learning environment*, as a generic category, summarises ideals about the related context. Educational environments are considered to be diverse and allow different forms of teaching. All contents should be sufficiently provided in the classrooms. A classroom promotes the interest of pupils, inspires, motivates, and represents a familiar environment familiar, it should not be a dull environment. Sufficient equipment is available and the number of students in a class should not be "too high". Well-tempered rooms with enough fresh air and plenty of light are essential. Ergonomic seating should be available. New media such as laptop smartphones, smart-boards, and video projectors are considered a must in future school environments. Relaxation zones are also being discussed.

The last generic category, *Working environment*, contains statements about the "ideal" workplace of a teacher. It is stated that the teaching profession is frequently criticised in society since teachers seem to work little because of the holidays. Political developments and educational changes are described as a negative impact on educational environments; frequent changes towards requirements complicate the teaching profession. In addition, many students have a clear idea of where they want to teach. Lower secondary school is favored, gymnasium and upper secondary schools are described as the preferred goal of employment; also schools with alternative curricular; schools from disadvantaged areas are referred to as less popular. It is argued that one will stay in a school forever once he or she started there. Student teachers hope for "nice" colleagues and "good" cooperation and do not want colleagues who are "bad" teachers. Also, "good" cooperation with parents, students, and management is desired. In general, a school represents a place of well-being. Student teachers hope for their subjects and do not want to teach different ones which they have not been educated in. An own desk and the desire for supervision are emphasised. Political work outside school is also desired. In addition, current technological developments are discussed and it is noted that the teaching environment will change significantly. New media are described as challenges.

5. Discussion of the results

Student teachers' beliefs about the teaching profession play an essential role in how content in teacher education is interpreted and how experiences during the process of becoming a teacher are reflected on. According to the results of this study, student teachers portray a professional teacher from a professional, personal, ethical, philosophical, and political viewpoint. While a multifaceted view of both the personal identity and the social demands are acknowledged, the synthesis of a beginning student teachers' professional identity portrays a highly idealistic version of a professional teacher. Aligning with the results of other studies, similarities can be identified.

Maaranen et al. (2016) analysed a total of 647 beliefs about teachers' personal practical theories in terms of being a good teacher and good teaching. By interviewing 84 student teachers from second to fifth years of studying an overall generalization of a "good" teacher, the foundations of "good" teaching and the teachers' daily work were discussed. Similar to this study, highly idealistic viewpoints and ideologies about teaching were emphasised. Common generalisations about how to act as a teacher were mentioned, rather than concrete ways of teaching methods and classroom management. A professional teacher is portrayed as very student-centered, and the daily work of a teacher consists of high idealism in terms of working environment, colleagues, and pupils. Stenberg et al. (2014) draw attention to what teacher identity positions student teachers' beliefs reflect at the beginning of teacher education by using Herbat's didactical triangle as a framework (pupil-teacher-content). Statements related to *pupils* refer to issues in learning, *teacher* includes personal history and teacher education, and *content* indicates the impact of the teacher education curriculum. Through analysing 71 teacher students at the beginning of their studies four main identity positions where identified: (1) Value position; (2) Practice position; pedagogical interactional position (2a), didactical position (2b), and content position (2c); (3) teacher position, and (4) context position. Aligning with the results of this study, value positions were highlighted as teachers of equality, impartiality, and fairness; teaching was referred to as a moral endeavour. The best interest of the child is strongly emphasised. Pedagogical interactions refer to creating a safe and happy environment, were individuality is emphasised. Didactical positions demand student-centered planning, motivational environments, individual learning arrangements, insight, and participation. The content position draws attention to the knowledge of what pupils should be thought in schools. Self-protection, coping strategies, and student-teacher relationships were issues discussed in the teacher position. The context position refers to the working environment of a teacher. Similar to this study, collaboration with other teachers, pupils, and parents, and general assumptions about the school environment where discussed. The results indicate, that "teacher identities of student teachers strongly reflect issues linked to values (20.36% of beliefs), pedagogical interaction between teacher and student (22.62% of beliefs) and orchestrating teaching (30.31% of beliefs) at the beginning of their teacher education. Fewer beliefs were related to content (2.94%), teacher (4.07%), or context (4.29%)" (Stenberg et al., 2014, p. 212). In this study, beliefs about teacher characteristics (28%) were strongly emphasised, followed by conceptions about a teachers' knowledge (23%), teachers' action (16%), the learning environment (13%), student-teacher relationship (12%) and working environment (8%). In addition to the ideal synthesis of a professional teacher, this study draws attention to tensions in becoming a teacher. Balancing curriculum requirements, students' personal interests, and the disposition in being a person of authority and caregiver were discussed by multiple participants. Aligning with the results of Pillen et al. (2013), the desire to give support and the conflicting conceptions of teaching are strongly emphasised by beginning student teachers. Throughout interviewing 24 participants, 59 discussed tensions were identified. Similar to presented results student teachers outline, that one can learn from ones' tensions. Facing such dispositions may result in negative feelings, but can have positive consequences if handled reflective. (Upper) Austrian teacher education claims to be reflective and aid reflection. Multiple researchers state that in many presented findings the success of reflection is unclear (Maaranen et al., 2016; Marcos, Sanchez, & Tillema, 2011); in contrast, the author of this paper argues that the presented findings reach a valid level of reflection. By discussing their professional development, student teachers repeatedly referred to seminars related to their practice designed to support reflection and personal development. Throughout almost all cases, the seminar was defined as one of the most important parts of teacher education. The author acknowledges, that the level of reflection differs between student teachers, it can be argued, that (Upper) Austrian teacher

education accomplishes a certain level of reflection, in which the development of student teachers is positively fostered.

6. Conclusion, implications and future research

The current study splits teachers' professional identity into individual statements about an "ideal" teacher, "good teaching", and an "optimal" working environment. While an overall synthesis of a beginning student teachers' professional identity is presented, it needs to be mentioned, that due to a large number of individual statements, and the vast amount of participants, such a construct does not represent the individual positions of the participants. The purpose of this study was not to analyse the data set from an individual perspective, but rather to understand what general conceptions about being a professional teacher existed among students.

According to the results of this study, student teachers' beliefs about a professional teacher reflected on teacher characteristics, the knowledge of a teacher, student-teacher relationship, teacher actions, learning, and working environments. Consequently, student teachers emphasised idealistic views about being a teacher and the environment of the teaching profession. A vast amount of conceptions concerned teachers' characteristics and student-teacher relationships, followed by the importance of a teachers' knowledge. Student teachers discuss the importance of personality traits, knowledge, and relationships intensively and well reflected, yet they portray the profession of a teacher from a strong pupil-centered perspective. This is understandable since the participants are at the beginning of their teacher training; personal experiences as pupils have a strong influence regarding to the nature of an "ideal" teacher, "good" teaching, and an "optimal" working environment. The results of this study may have been predictable as such. A strong idealistic and pupil-orientated approach of student teachers at the beginning of their teacher training can be found in multiple studies which use teacher identity formation as a framework of understanding the professional development of student teachers (Lamote & Engels, 2010; Lentillon-Kaestner, Guillet-Descas, Martinent, & Cece, 2018; Stenberg et al., 2014).

"The developing teacher identities of student teachers not only affect their commitment to their teacher education, but also shape, control and form how they select information from their coursework and orient themselves towards future teaching" (Stenberg et al., 2014, p. 215). (Upper) Austrian teacher education provides a constant opportunity to reflect on one's professional development based on theoretical inputs and experiences in practice (Altrichter et al., 2015), yet is still unclear how such guidance influences future teachers in their everyday work. Participants have criticised the lack of practice, and the dispositions between the beliefs of teachers at practice schools and the theory-driven understandings of teaching in teacher education. Similar to the results of Allen and Wright (2014), an optimal practicum environment is desired in which student teachers are able to enact theory without dispositions between stakeholders about role responsibilities of the university, school staff, and student teachers. However, it is far from clear which collaborator affects the teaching style of pre-service teachers the most. Richardson (1996) states, that student teachers' personal beliefs about the profession can be so strong, that new information can be ignored during initial teacher training resulting in teaching based on preexisting (school) experiences and beliefs. It is still unclear how pre-service teachers adapt to the new Austrian reform in teacher education and which processes influence teachers' professional identity development at what scale.

The author highlights, that this paper just represents the first round of interviews, an annual data collection throughout the whole teacher education program is planned to monitor the professional identity development of all participants. The presented study aimed to map a starting point for further research. The follow-up rounds of this research must not only consist of an overall generalization of student teachers' professional identity. To understand professional identity development from an individual perspective, a focus on all various identity positions needs to be established (Stenberg & Maaranen, 2020). One must also bear in mind, that based on this data, it can not be concluded on, how teacher education influences the student teacher's beliefs and therefore professional identity development. A continuing exploration of teacher students by reconstructing identity through beliefs and narrations is necessary. The author argues that teachers' professional identity "reflects not only the

professional, educational, and pedagogical aspects of being a teacher but – more importantly – the imprints of the complex interconnectedness of one's cumulative life experience as a human being" (Bukor, 2015, p. 323). It is argued, that future research should investigate professional identity from a holistic perspective of being a teacher, a longitudinal research approach is necessary, ideally starting at the beginning of an individual teacher's training throughout the whole career of being a teacher.

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