Subjective Learning Needs in Institutionalized Educational Contexts - On Students' Developmental Tasks in University Teacher Education

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INTRODUCTION

The Austrian reform programme "LehrerInnenbildung Neu" is aiming at profoundly professionalizing university teacher education. Consequently, it claims for a reconception and reframing of its curricular standards. Following the concerns of PHD Graduate School „Bildungsgangforschung" (cf. Trautmann 2004) and Hahn's (cf. 2004) concept of subjective developmental tasks, this project takes students' learning needs as a starting point for conceptional changes in the course of this forthcoming reform. By means of an empirical interview survey on teacher education students' (TES) well-being (1st survey wave) and their moments of crisis (2nd survey wave) they went through in the course of their studies, TES learning needs in the form of subjective, study-based developmental tasks are reconstructed (Grounded Theory; cf. Strauss & Corbin 2010).

This still marks an essential research desideratum in educational sciences (cf. Hericks 2006), as TES' well-being and its modulating factors as well as TES' developmental tasks have only been rudimentarily researched so far. According to action-based theories of learning (cf. Holzkamp 1995), obstacles are seen as the breeding ground for learning and development and might point out crucial and inevitable personal learning needs. Problems affecting TES' well-being on the other hand might allude demanding situations whose handling is urgent and requires a lot of effort (cf. Goller 2009). They also point out demanding areas during TES' studies, where greater support of the educational institution is needed to lower their turning into a highly critical situation and to reduce drop-out rates and TES' loss of motivation during their years of studies.

AIMS

Overall, this study aims at approaching the concerns of educational concepts (cf. Gebhard & Combe 2007; Trautmann 2004), which understand learners as active and autonomous and where identified learning needs are considered as an essential point of reference in the course of the on-going curriculum development. In detail, this project focuses on ...

a) the reconstruction of subjective developmental tasks from TES' perspective based on health-affecting difficulties and moments of crisis within the course of their studies. (main objective)
b) the comparison between the reconstructed learning and developmental areas and curricular learning standards in order to identify problematic discrepancies.
c) the identification of possible measures for support in the course of TES' process of handling developmental tasks in the course of their studies.

METHOD & SAMPLE

interview question I:
How did you feel in the course of your studies?

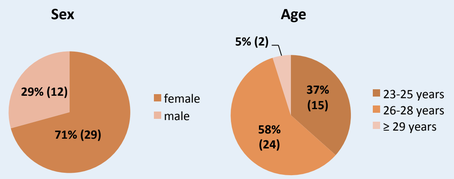
interview question II:
Which highly challanging situations did you experience during your years of study?

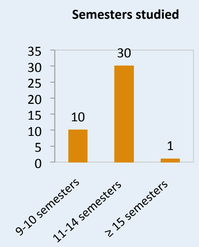
cf. Strauss & Corbin (2010)

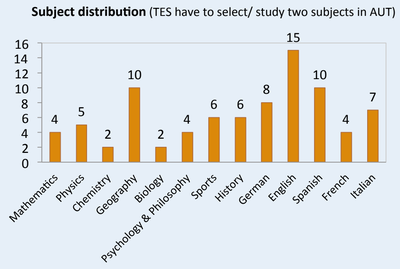
	Survey Instruments		Sample		Method
core study (qualitative)	**semi-narrative interviews**		graduates (Innsbruck) **n= 31**		Grounded Theory MAXQDA
	I) focus well-being	II) focus study-related crises	**I) n= 19**	**II) n= 12**	
secondary analysis (qualitative)	narrative interviews on TES' professional development		graduates (Innsbruck) **n= 10**		Grounded Theory MAXQDA

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA

- examinated students: **N= 41** (interviews)
- mean age: **26.1**
- mean number of semesters studied: **11.6**







SELCETED FINDINGS

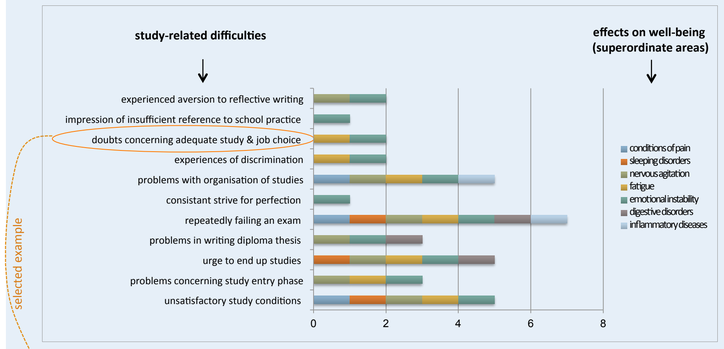


Fig. 1: Experienced difficulties indicated by students' well-being (interviews/ core study)

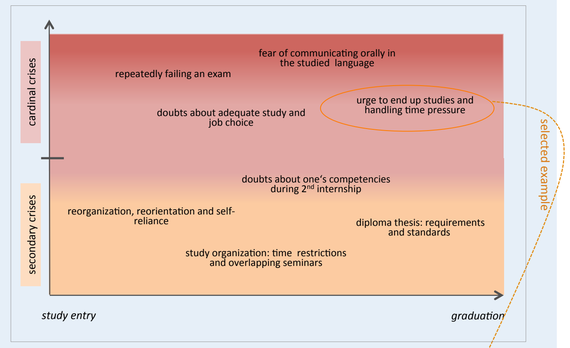


Fig. 2: Identified crises (interviews/ core study)

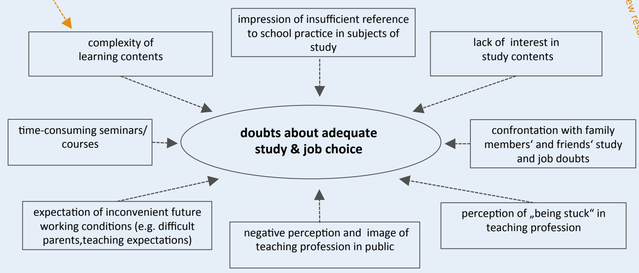


Fig. 3: Modulating factors and causes of doubts concerning study and job choice

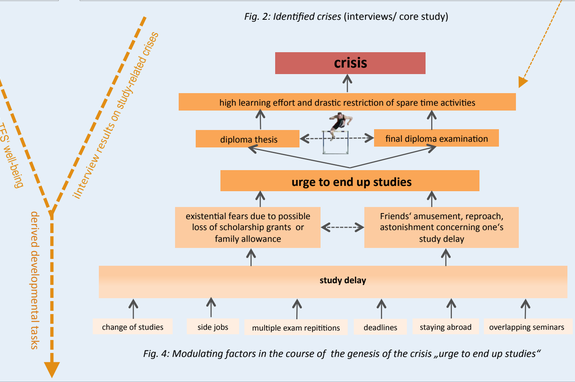


Fig. 4: Modulating factors in the course of the genesis of the crisis „urge to end up studies"

resources which helped TES to overcome difficulties :

- spare time activities
- experiences of success
- progress in studies
- enthusiasm for the subject of study
- studying abroad
- social interchange
- positive teaching experience
- positive anticipations concerning future job career
- personality traits (e.g.: ambition, power of endurance)

Developmental Tasks	Dimensions
Competence	▪ learning to meet challenges of every day study life and cope with them offensively, innovatively and autonomously ▪ showing reduced avoidance or withdrawal behaviour (e.g.: reducing drop outs or switching programmes of studies) ▪ learning to structure and organize one's studies and set priorities concerning spare time activities ▪ enhancing confidence in own abilities ▪ developing individual learning strategies
Failure Tolerance	▪ getting to know one's flaws and deficits and learning to accept them ▪ developing an understanding for the fact that no one is flawless; realizing that personal deficits bear potential for individual development ▪ adapting and reducing exaggerated expectations and demands and setting them in relation to the difficulty of a particular situation ▪ reducing one's excessive strive for perfectionism ▪ establishing understanding for flaws and deficits of others (e.g.: for pupils they teach), promoting a culture of feedback
Resilience	▪ handling demanding situations in a more easy-going, resource-friendly and composed way ▪ developing strategies of motivation ▪ enhancing the feeling of having everything under control/ enhancing one's adaptability to unknown situations ▪ learning to distance from one's studies in spare-time ▪ enhancing consciousness for personal resources and promoting them
Self- Concept	▪ getting conscious of one's strengths, competencies and occupational interests, getting to know oneself ▪ distancing from external advice and trying to identify one's own wants and needs ▪ trying to answer the question of job adequacy and clarifying doubts concerning one's choice of study ▪ enhancing faith and confidence in oneself and one's abilities
Autonomy	▪ learning to master one's life discretely and independently in an unfamiliar surrounding without the support of family members ▪ cutting ties with the parental home; perceiving oneself as an autonomous and independent person ▪ learning to look after oneself, keep appointments, take decisions independently and assume responsibility for one's actions

Fig. 5: Subjective developmental tasks derived from results on TES' well-being and their moments of crisis

CONCLUSION

Findings of this study have shown that TES primarily concentrate on *enhancing their self-regulation abilities* (e.g.: self-confidence, autonomy of action, resistance) and *resume developmental tasks of adolescence* (e.g.: clarifying job choice, break with parents' home) during their years of studies (cf. Havighurst 1972; Dreher & Dreher 1985). The obstacles which were linked to TES' well-being and their moments of crisis therefore primarily refer to personal issues and range from *clarifying study and job doubts*, *organising one's life*, *dealing with setbacks* to *reducing one's high values* or *lowering one's high aspirations*. *Obstacles genuinely concerning teaching profession have only been rudimentarily mentioned*.

At this point the question arises why study contents are of such minor impact? Do students need to solve personal problems first before they are able to concentrate on more intellectual and content-focused (e.g.: didactics) ones or are they perceived not as tiring as the identified personal issues?

On answer to that questions can be found in Fuller & Browns (cf. 1975) model on the different stages of teacher development, which have shown that teachers in their first years of teaching need to go through a survival stages first until they reach the routine and mastery level, where they are able to concentrate on their teaching performance or their pupil's learning needs.

Since those developmental tasks mark significant steps within TES' professional development, they need to be considered as an essential point of reference in the course of the on-going curriculum development. Concerning TES' *self-development*, university teacher education needs to provide *more additional time as well as a special kind of mentoring* to guarantee better support for TES' personality development (cf. Neuß 2009; Hericks 2006). This could be reached by implementing study-integrated supervision sessions (cf. Neuß 2009; Hericks 2006) or also by extending the education period itself. Moreover, it turned out that *social interchange* especially with fellow students (function: collective lamenting, feeling of being integrated, getting support etc.) and *study-integrated practical training* (function: confirmation of job suitability, enhancement of positive anticipation concerning occupational future, experiences of success) represent important resources. Therefore, *social interchange* especially between novices and experienced TES has to be promoted (e.g.: ceremonies or intensified tutoring) and *study-integrated practical training phases* need to be maintained or even increased. Also an *obligatory pre-university practical phase* is advisable, as students might be promoted in to clarifying occupational doubts in advance.

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