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ABSTRACT
        The professional development of teachers, conceived of as
the qualitative changes in teachers' professional behavior throughout their
career, was studied through a procedure called "stimulated autobiographical
self-thematization." Ten primary school teachers from Flemish Belgian schools
were asked to reflect on their careers so as to construct professional
biographies. From these biographies, each teacher's personal interpretive
framework was constructed. The procedure, which was developed through pilot
tests, called for teachers to be stimulated to thematize their own
experiences. The study illustrates a number of issues in
narrative-biographical research, including the relationship between the
researcher and the subject. Findings suggest that narrative inquiry is
appropriate for educational research, allowing an in-depth understanding of
teacher learning and development. (Contains 1 figure and 54 references.)
(SLD)

NARRATIVE-BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH ON TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Exemplifying a methodological research procedure

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the pleas for narrative and biographical approaches in educational research have become ever louder and more numerous. Notions like "story", "narrative", "life history", "biography" increasingly appeared in the title of research reports, papers, articles...The old trunk of the biographical method in sociology, with branches in psychology and historiography (oral history-movement) wears again a full and deep green crown of leaves (e.g. Carter & Doyle, 1996; Carter, 1993; Casey, 1995-1996; Kelchtermans, 1993a). In this paper I want to argue that narrative-biographical methods are powerful and suitable tools in research aiming at understanding complex educational **processes**, in which the **meaning** for those involved is given a central place. Teacher development is such a meaningfull and complex process. By presenting a reflective account of a particular narrative-biographical research project, I will illustrate and exemplify this claim. At the same time this illustration will show the necessity of using a rigorous research procedure, that is made explicit and accounted for. In my opinion it is through this methodological explicitness that the results of such a process can be called proper research.

In much narrative research, however, the specific procedures for data collection and analysis in biographical studies remain shadowy and unarticulated. We agree with Goodson, arguing that "the requirement of procedural clarification is integral to developing more refined ethical and methodological guidelines in the study of teachers' lives" (Goodson, 1992, p.247). Through this paper we hope to stimulate the necessary kind of exchange and to contribute to a more general methodological discussion.

After situating the aims of the research project, we describe the procedure, called "stimulated autobiographical selfthematisation". Further we focus on specific methodological issues in narrative-biographical research. We will highlight particular problems and how we coped with them.

A STUDY ON TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In our study we were interested in teachers' professional development, conceived of as the qualitative changes in teachers' professional behaviour throughout their career. More specifically, we wanted to

understand how teachers make sense of their experiences and how these experiences influence their daily practice. The teachers' perspective is thus central in our study. Therefore we asked teachers to reflect back on their career so as to reconstruct their *professional biographies* (the story in which the career experiences retrospectively are organized). From these professional biographies or career stories we reconstructed the teacher's *personal interpretive framework*. This framework consists of two important (and interwoven) domains. First there is the professional self: the way a teacher conceives of herself as a teacher.[1] This self-representation consists in the teacher's personal answer to the question: who am I as a teacher? The second domain is the subjective educational theory: the personal system of knowledge and beliefs that frames a teacher's perception of the situation and guides her interpretation of and reaction in it. Both result from the dynamic interactions between the teacher and her professional environment (organizational context, colleagues, parents, pupils, the local community, etc.) over time. That is why the two domains in the personal interpretive framework can be used as indicators for the professional development. So the basic goal was to understand how teachers think and how these interpretive frameworks determine their professional actions. Our study fits in the research stream that is defined by Carter & Doyle as "centered on the practical understandings that teachers develop as they enter into and begin to teach and on the ways in which beginning and/or experienced teachers come to frame their understandings within their life stories or life experiences" (Carter & Doyle, 1996, p.129).

During a pilot study (Kelchtermans, 1993b), a preliminary conceptual framework and a research procedure were developed. The conceptual framework, based on a literature study, functioned as a set of "sensitizing concepts", inspired by the "grounded theory-approach" (Glaser & Straus, 1967). These concepts reflected our view on professional development as a lifelong learning process, resulting in a personal interpretive framework, encompassing the professional self and the subjective educational theory. Further we also used the concepts of "critical incident, critical phase and critical person" as heuristic tools to explore the professional biography. The concepts refer to experiences that strongly influenced teachers' professional development. They constituted "key experiences" or "turning points" in a teachers' career. They question teachers' normal routine behaviour or ,perhaps, constitute a problem that requires a creative solution. The teachers are forced to reconsider their ideas, beliefs or teaching strategies. As Sikes et al. argue "critical incidents are a useful area to study, because they reveal, like a flashbulb, the major choice and change times in people's lives" (Sikes et al., 1985, p.57).

The pilot study resulted in a first refinement of these concepts. The research procedure itself was also revised and improved, based on the experiences in the pilot study (e.g. adding observations as complementary technique). This paper focusses on the research procedure and methodological reflections. The conceptual framework and the results of the study are presented in detail elsewhere (Kelchtermans, 1993a and 1993b).

THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Overview of the research procedure

The research procedure we developed, can be characterized as a **stimulated autobiographical selfthematisation** (Kelchtermans, 1994). The procedure aims at making teachers look back, reflectively, at their own career (*autobiographical*) and to *stimulate* them to *thematize* their experiences. For that aim we combined several research techniques: a questionnaire, a cycle of biographical interviews, school and classroom observations, interviews with key informants (e.g. principal, colleagues) and (of lesser importance) analysis of documents (e.g. school papers, brochures). Before starting the project, the entire procedure for data collection as well as data analysis was described in a detailed **research scenario** (Kelchtermans, 1990).

In a **preparatory questionnaire (PQ)** the respondent was asked to reconstruct her formal career chronologically. After indicating the period at the Teacher Training College, she wrote down for every school year since then, the school and grade she had thaught. These data provided the researcher a general image of the respondent's career that was used as a starting point for the interviews.

Very central for the procedure, was a **cycle of three biographical interviews.** It was developed during a pilot study (Kelchtermans, 1993b) and refined for the main study. We chose biographical interviews (open, narrative) because we wanted to acknowledge the subjective perception and the narrative character of the professional biography. In fact we used a semi-structured interview form, since we were also interested in comparisions between the career stories. The interviews were organized in a *cyclical* way: after every interview the data were analysed. This analysis provided topics for the next interview. This way the interviews constituted *cumulative* data sources, revealing ever more refined pieces of the "life puzzle" (Cole, 1991, p.14).[2]

The **observations in school and classroom (OBS) and the interview with the principal** aimed mainly at gathering additional information on the professional context of the interviewees. Every respondent was observed in her classroom while teaching on at least three occasions for half a day. During these observations the researcher spent the entire day in the school. This allowed him to observe informally the school life (staff room interactions, breaks etc.). In the interviews, following the observations, the respondents often referred to these school visits, e.g. when talking about a pupil or concrete aspects of school life. The implicit message then was "you saw how we handle those things" or "you've been around, so you know how things go here". The observations further allowed the researcher to ask specific questions by referring to experiences or observations during his presence in the school. In short, the observations provided the researcher an image of the reality the teacher talked about.

A central role in the research procedure was also given to the **research log (NOT)**. The researcher reported on every contact with the respondents and wrote down reflections on every interview, school visit

or phone call with a respondent. This reflection was supported by checklists with questions in the research scenario. Using these lists the researcher documented his observations on the interview situation (e.g. presence of other persons; specific non-verbal reactions to certain questions by the respondent; description of the interview location) or the content of informal talks before and after the recorded interviews, during the school visits. Special attention was given to the respondents' reactions or statements at the arrival or leaving of the researcher. These utterances often set the tone for the interview or indicated themes the respondent currently was concerned about (Measor, 1985, p.20). Also after the tape recorder was turned off, the respondent often revealed key information "in the relaxation and general chit-chat that follows sessions, a golden moment for hard truths and shared confidences" (Woods, 1985, p.20).

A second series of reflections that were documented in the log concerned his personal experience of the interview/observation visit by the researcher. How did he feel? Which thoughts flashed through his mind during the sessions? Did he make silent commentaries or develop preliminary interpretations? Did he hesitate to ask certain questions?

However, the research log was more than just an additional source of information. It was also an important instrument to document the actual research process. Practical decisions, made during the data collection or analysis, were written down in the log. In the same way we reported difficulties, encountered during the research process and the way they were solved. Further the log contained the preliminary interpretive ideas or developing insights. This way the log complemented the general instructions and rules in the research scenario, with the story of the research process with every individual respondent.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the research procedure and the specific techniques used.[3]

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

The data collection

Data were collected from experienced Primary School teachers (15-25 years of classroom experience) in four different Flemish schools. From every school we thus had two or three respondents. Six of them were male and four were female. Only when the entire procedure was finished with respondents of one school, we started the process in the next school.

During the first interview (I1) the respondent's career was explored chronologically. The data from the preparatory questionnaire (PQ) on the formal career were used as a guide. The questions were conceived of as narrative impulses, stimulating teachers to recall and tell their own stories. Thus, although for the researcher the interview was semi-structured, the respondents had large degrees of freedom in answering. To them the questions were quite open.

At the end of I1 the respondents received a log formular (L1) and were asked to write down any remarks,

ideas or additional information that came up their minds afterwards and seemed relevant to the themes of the first interview.

All interviews were taperecorded and transcribed word for word. As a general rule of thumb for the **transcription** we aimed at minimal loss of information (e.g. including non- and paraverbal behaviour). Further the protocols (interview transcriptions), as well as the field notes from the observations, were **coded**. The code list was developed during the pilot study (Kelchtermans, 1993b) and adapted for the main study. The codes were primarily descriptive: they summarized the content of the text fragment. Apart from these descriptive codes, we also used a limited number of interpretive codes, referring to aspects of professional self and subjective educational theory. The use of this codes presupposed a further interpretation of the text fragment in terms of the conceptual framework.

The **fragmentation** of the transcription text during the coding, was based on the meaningfullness of the text fragments. The function of the codes was to indicate the global content of the fragments and to make it possible that fragments about the same topic were later brought together for interpretation. This implied that almost every fragment received more than one code. In the **first analysis step (AN1)** we identified the **"information gaps"** (see Woods, 1985, p.21). Gaps in the chronology, unclear passages (too few details, descriptions too vague) and "white spots" (aspects of school life that hadn't been thematized yet) were identified, by careful reading of the protocol.

Next we read the text once again, looking for indications of professional self and subjective educational theory. This resulted in preliminary interpretations. Then we introduced the relevant information from the research log in the analysis. Finally the results of AN1 led to a synthetic memo.

Shortly after the first interview, the **first classroom observation (OBS1) and the interview with the principal** took place. The observations were made in the respondents' classroom, but the school life was also observed more informally during lunch pauses and breaks. The interview with the principal adressed topics of school organization, number of pupils and teachers, contacts between school and community. Through this interview we collected information about the school context.

AN1 and OBS1 constituted the basis for the **preparation of the second interview (P2)**. This interview consisted of two parts. The questions in the *"respondent specific part"* related to the topics from the first interview. The information gaps and tentative interpretations were translated into questions and presented to the respondent. We asked for further explanation or specific details. The second, *"respondent un-specific part"* consisted of a series of questions that were identical for all the respondents. The notions of the conceptual framework constituted the basis for these questions[4].

The **second interview (I2)** started with a discussion about the eventual notes on the log formular. Further, the questions from the respondent specific and the respondent unspecific part were presented. The interview and the data analysis of I2 were analogue with I1. Also at the end of I2 the respondent received a log formular (L2). On the formular, the questions from the respondent un-specific part were repeated. As with L1, the second formular was also meant as a kind of "safety net" for eventual relevant information the respondent might remember after the interviewer had left. The formular had to be sent back to the respondent before a specific date. We mention here that the logs were only very rarely used by the

respondents. Probably this can be explained by the fact that autobiographical reflection was quite unusual for the respondents. When the researcher was absent, the most important incentive for that kind of reflection was missing. Further, the informal talks during the observation visits functioned as complementary contact moments between researcher and respondent.

The second analysis step (AN2) was executed in analogy with the first (AN1). The data from the interview with the principal and the observations were also coded and prepared for further analysis.

On the basis of OBS1, OBS2 and OBS3, the interview with the principal, AN1, AN2, the log formulars and the research log (NOT) a **synthesis text** was written. This text was constructed along a fixed structure, based on the conceptual framework (Kelchtermans, 1993b)[5]. This structure reflected also the steps in the interpretation process: starting with the formal career data, we reconstructed the professional biography. We then focused on the critical incidents, phases and persons in that biography as an intermediate step, to arrive at the final analytical level: the interpretive reconstruction of the professional self and the subjective educational theory. Here we also included data on the actual professional environment (macro-, meso- and micro-level). By proceeding through these different steps we kept a structural analogy between the interpretive analysis of the data and the transformation of the data into a manageable format.

This transformation of the data is described by Woods as distilling "the essence of the biography into more manageable form, retaining the teacher's 'ordinary' language for the most part, but organising the material in a sociologically meaningful way" (Woods, 1985, p.23; see also Huberman, 1989, p.40). By using extensive quotations from the interviews, we tried to meet Woods' demand to maximally keep the spontaneous talk of the teachers in those syntheses.[6] At the same time control by the respondent became possible through this summarizing document (Woods, 1985, p.22). About one week before the final interview, the synthesis text was sent to the respondent, who was asked to read it carefully and critically append any remarks or comments.

For some respondents we also prepared a respondent specific part for the third interview, because the data from earlier interviews or observations weren't clear enough yet or because of certain interpretations that needed to be controlled by the respondent.

The synthesis text was the basis for the **third interview (I3)**. In the first part of that interview, the synthesis text was checked page by page and the comments of the respondent were collected. In the final part of this interview we reflected on the research process (*meta reflection*): we explored the way the respondent had experienced her participation in the study (see below). The **third analysis step (AN3)** was the same as the former ones. The information from interview 3 (amendments, the metareflection) and the reflective notes of the researcher were added to the synthesis text (SYN2). This way we got the **Professional Biographical Profile (PBP)**, a document containing all relevant information about one respondent (including reflections and interpretations by the researcher) in a structured and condensed form.

The data analysis

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The data were analysed in two steps. The **vertical analysis** consisted of the sequence of interpretive transformations of the data during the collection process (the analyses between the steps of the data collection), and resulted in the *Professional Biographical Profile*.

The Professional Biographical Profile, in its final textual form, had two important *functions*. Firstly there was the *communicative function*. The text determined the form in which the data became accessible for others. It constituted the medium through which the research data and their analysis were communicated towards the external world. Further the text had an *argumentative-rethorical function*, since it aimed at convincing the reader that the career stories were correctly presented and that the interpretations were plausible (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.177; Geertz, 1988, p.16 and p.143). This implied that the text contained sufficient evidence (e.g.fragments of transscription protocols or field notes) to ground the statements and to argue for them. That is why we composed the Profiles as "thick descriptions", so that "thick interpretations" became possible (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1989,p.83-103).

It is clear that the *writing* of the Professional Biographical Profiles was a crucial step in the entire research procedure (Atkinson, 1991, p.164). This writing implied much more than a mere technical process of reporting (Clifford, 1986, p.2; Wolcott, 1990, p.127-135). Although the different steps in the analysis were depicted in the research scenario and the content of the different text sections was prestructured by the conceptual framework, still a creative process of composing a coherent text by the researcher was necessary. Writing implies an intensive, reflective conversation with the data, including sustained interpretive analysis and careful phrasing. According to this we listed some general "rules of thumb" as a guide for the writing process in the research scenario:

- phrase carefully: strive for unambiguous formulation, to avoid the text taking multiple meanings;
- use descriptive, factual language: make sure that descriptions and interpretations refer to specific observations or interview fragments (identify them by locating them in the raw research data);
- separate description from interpretation: clearly indicate where description ends and interpretation begins (avoid interference);
- stay close to the original transcripts: use quotations from the raw data;
- permanently check the interpretations: continually control your interpretations, by confronting them with all the data available (constant comparision; see Glaser, 1969)
- control for evaluative statements: since the judgments or evaluative reflections inevitably arise during the research process, it is better not to suppress them completely but to handle them as consciously as possible. This way it is more possible to control them and avoid their unconscious interference during the interpretation. These evaluative reflections should be part of the researcher's comments (notes). We proceeded in the same way with the affective dimension in the research process (see below).

Before we sent the Profiles to the respondents, a colleague -not involved in the research project- read them over very carefully and commented on the text draft as an outsider[7]. This way we got peer-feedback on the text.

Since the textual structure of the Professional Biographical Profiles was identical for every respondent, the Profiles constituted the basis for the next step, the **horizontal analysis**. In this horizontal analysis the Professional Biographical Profiles were systematically compared, using the technique of *"constant comparative analysis"* (Glaser, 1969; Wester, 1987, p.46). In our study this concretely implied a cyclical repeated pattern of close reading, developing more general interpretations and controlling these interpretations by confronting them with the data. First the Profiles were read through entirely, to get a general overview. Next we compared all the text sections in the Profiles one by one for every respondent. In a final integral reading of the Profiles we checked whether we had included all the data available. This horizontal analysis resulted in a set of recurring patterns and common themes among the professional biographies of the respondents (Kelchtermans, 1993a, p.452-454).

By describing the research procedure, we have made clear why we labeled this approach **"stimulated autobiographical selfthematisation"**. The interview questions stimulated the respondents to reflect back on their own career experiences and to thematize them. This reflection concerned their own "lives as teachers"; they were invited to tell their autobiography. Since personal identity develops during the life history, telling an autobiography actually always implies thematizing oneself. This is especially true in a job like teaching, where personal identity (self) and professional performance are so closely interwoven.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN NARRATIVE-BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

In this section we adress a number of specific methodological issues in biographical research. But first of all we want to stress the strengths of this narrative-biographical appr

The research relation as the pivot of biographical research

In biographical research the relation between researcher and respondent pervades every aspect of the research process: it determines the quality and the quantity of the information gathered (Cole, 1991, p.7) A very important condition for establishing an appropriate relation is a feeling of **trust** towards the researcher (Cole, 1991, p.11; Measor, 1985, p.61). Only a respondent who feels safe and perceives the researcher as trustworthy, will be prepared to share her autobiographical story. The relation of trust should permit that "teachers feel sufficiently free and relaxed to be 'themselves'." (Woods, 1985, p.14). To achieve this, we explained from the start to the respondents how the research process would evolve and what we expected from them (Plummer, 1983, p.90-93). The respondents were also told how they had been selected for the study. Further the professional background of the researcher was clarified. We emphasized that the data would be treated on a confidential and anonymous basis.

Moreover the reseacher invited at the end of every session questions or remarks concerning the research

process. Thus opportunities were created in order to capture any particular concern about the research endeavour.

Trustfulness is further enhanced by the **reciprocity** in the relation. Collecting biographical data should not be a "one-way-traffic", but rather a process of "mutual storytelling" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.4; Woods, 1985, p.14). In this process of mutual storytelling, it is important to gain credibility in the eyes of the respondent. This can be accomplished "through sharing relevant personal anecdotes" (Cole, 1991, p.12; also Woods, 1985, p.20 and Seidman, 1991, p.66). During the frequent contacts (interviews, observations, informal talks) the researcher was often asked questions about the background of his study (why studying this topic this way?). But respondents were also interested in his opinion about specific situations in the school. They wanted to identify common acquaintances or asked questions concerning the researcher's hobbys, family life, etc. Normally these questions were answered honestly by the researcher, without giving up his role however. He remained alert for the possible influence of his utterances on the teacher's story. The contents of these more informal exchanges were documented in the research log. Experience showed that, especially after the second interview, the respondents felt the need to know more about the researcher. It was as if the balance of giving and taking in the research process had to be restored. The researcher found himself confronted with the subtle task of engaging himself as a person far enough in the relation (to remain credible and to get relevant data), with the risk of going too far and influencing the content of the interview too much (see e.g. Munro, 1991, p.10).

However, we also learned the strategic importance of being perceived as a **relative outsider**. The researcher was a university member and not a teacher, thus not directly involved in the educational system. As such he objectively didn't constitute any threat for the respondent('s career). On the other hand it was also clear that participating in the research project wouldn't bring the respondent any direct personal advantage. The interests and power relations of both partners were clear, which allowed the interview to take more or less the form of a "power-free dialogue" (Legewie, s.d., p.16).
Of course, the researcher was only a "relative" outsider and he had to be sufficiently acquainted with the reality in schools. He had to be familiar with the general administrative procedures in schools, with the role of the school board and the parents committee, with the task of the inspectorate. This way the respondent realised that she could continue her story, without having to explain all contextual information in great detail. That would have slowed down the pace of the story too much and could have demotivated the respondent.

Talking about biographical research, Catani states: "The work is above all the product of an encounter; it is the result of a two-way seduction, a love story." (Catani, 1981, p.212). Apart from the element of reciprocity, his statement also points at the **affective aspects in the research relation**. Research implies more than a pure cognitive exchange of objective descriptive answers to informative questions. Both parties in the meeting observe and listen to each other and build a personal image of the other. This image is also evaluative. More concretely this meant e.g. that the researcher felt more sympathy for some

respondents or appreciated some classroom practices more than others. The same was true for the respondents: some of them liked the researcher more then others, and this determined their commitment to the research process.

The researcher had to cope with still other relevant feelings: discomfort or uncertainty during the first meetings with a respondent; enthusiasm when hearing certain stories, but also indignation and anger with other anecdotes.

Non- or paraverbal signs are also very important in this respect. Eye contact, smiling, concerned or surprised wrinkling of the eyebrows, etc. are highly relevant, because respondents want affirmation and reassurance (Measor, 1985, p.62). After all, they are sharing rather personal experiences and thoughts with a stranger.

Methodologically this affective dimension is not an easy matter. On the other hand, there is no point in denying or minimizing it. Moreover, the character of trust and the implied familiarity with each other are necessary conditions for succesful biographical research. The interplay between the emotional and the intellectual is an essential element and should thus be made public (Ely et al., p.107 e.v.; see also Faraday & Plummer, 1979; Young & Tardif, 1992). As a qualitative and certainly as a biographical researcher one is forced to aknowledge these affective aspects and recognize them as essential in the collection and interpretation of the data. The only way to control these aspects is continuous self reflection by the researcher (Denzin, 1970, p.11). The affective dimension therefore was explicitly present in the researcher's log notes.

Summarizing, we could characterize the **researcher's role** during this biographical study, as active, interested and non-evaluative listening and observing. His attitude toward the respondent was above all one of empathy, acknowledgement, appraisal and loyalty (Woods, 1985, p.20-21). The respondent's story was listened to with alert openmindedness. In biographical research the person of the researcher is the essential research instrument (Bergold & Breuer, 1987, p.40). It is the reflective commitment of his social behavioral and interpretive **competenties**, that make it possible for the researcher to explore and understand the world as experienced by the respondent (Bergold & Breuer, 1987, p.40; see also Karaka-los, 1979, p.227).

The character of the (auto)biographical data production: an interactive process of creating meaning

Autobiographical data are produced in a social setting (interview) where the respondent is stimulated by the researcher to look back reflectively on the personal career. This setting influences the production of the data. The respondent tells her story to the researcher, or more generally to the implicit audience she assumes behind the researcher. The respondent's expectation of what will happen to the information she shares (e.g. the degree to which it will be made public) determines her telling (Carter, 1993, p.9;

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Polkinghome, 1988, p.164). Or in Angrosino's words: "autobiographical materials are most fruitfully treated as documents of interaction between a subject recounting his or her life experiences and an audience, either the researcher recording the story or the readers of the resulting text." (Angrosino, 1991, p.1). Hoeppel emphasizes the "intention to communicate" (Mitteilungszweck), inherent to autobiographical data (Hoeppel, 1983, p.311). One writes an autobiography with an image of the reader in mind or tells it to a listener. More or less conscious motives and intentions play a role throughout the story and influence what is told and what not and the way it is told. In 1942 Allport already mentioned the necessity to take into account the motives of the respondent in biographical research (Allport, 1942, p.69-74).[8]

Biographical data thus are inherently *intersubjective*: they arise out of an interactive communication context, where the storyteller retrospectively shares his or her experiences with a listener. A reflection about the influence of the interview context on the data therefore must be part of the data-analysis. In our study this was included in the systematic reflection in the research log by the interviewer, after every interview. This reflection was again guided by a checklist, included in the research scenario (Kelchtermans, 1990). This list contained questions like:

- how would you characterize the interview relation?
- were there a lot of laughs? Why?
- were there critical moments during the interview (e.g. refusals to answer, painful silences)?
- did you have questions in mind, you didn't dare to ask? Why not? How could they be adressed in the next meeting?
- were there moments of significant emotional reaction? E.g. expressions of anger, frustration, grief, happiness, enthusiasm,...?
- were there other people present during the interview? Who? When? Do you have indications that their presence influenced the interview? If yes, how?
- ...

On the other hand the storytelling as such already has a meaning for the respondent. Bahrdt believes that people have their reasons for recalling the different experiences during their lives and putting them in a meaningful order. This way they create the history of their personal life, a history that can be told to an audience. In the act of storytelling the story is constituted and developed (Bahrdt, 1982, p.24). By telling her story, the respondent acquires it as her (developing) story. This constitutes the inherently *subjective* character of autobiographical data: they are about a personal understanding of experienced situations. There is always a tension between the facts and the personal interpretation. Autobiographical data consist in the idiosyncratic linguistic presentation of the subjective mastering of objective facts (Schulze, 1979, p.53). Thus it is important to realise that autobiographical stories don't inform about facts and events, but about experiences and their meaning for the storyteller. It is not a matter of truth, but of "truth for me" as storyteller. Biographical approaches reveal subjective realities, ideas, feelings, experiences.

Ethical issues in biographical research

Qualitative research in general, and biographical research in particular have a clear ethical dimension (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.49; Ely et al., 1991, p.218; Plummer, 1983, p.140-145). "A life history does deal with intimate material, and carries a high ethical load as a result" (Measor & Sikes, 1992, p.223). The researcher finds himself in "face to face relationships with other human beings in which ethical problems of the personal as well as the professional are bound to arise. Description is not neutral. It is the interpretive result of an interpersonal engagement with others (...)" (Soltis, 1989, p.127).

A first problem in our biographical research was the question of *intrusiveness*. How deep is one allowed to "dig" into the personal life history of the respondent? During the study we learned that respondents were willing to share their experiences in a detailed, straightforward and outspoken way. For an experienced interviewer it is quite easy to make people tell more and even more personal things about themselves than they first intended to. Therefore Measor and Sikes talk about the "coaxer" role of the biographical researcher, since the respondents are always to some degree "seduced" to share their life history (Measor & Sikes, 1992, p.221).

On the other hand, the private and personal worlds were very relevant for our research interest. Our dilemma thus was: how can we collect sufficient information for a reconstruction of the teachers' story, the roots of the professional self and the subjective educational theory, without penetrating the private sphere in an improper way? We don't think there are simple solutions to this dilemma. The researcher has to rely on his social sensitivity and tact. Respect for the respondent and integrity should be the Leitmotives for his behaviour. Thirst for sensation and other dubious curiosity are absolutely to be avoided. As a rule of thumb we never asked questions about the private sphere directly or explicitly. When the respondent happened to bring about these themes, the utterances were explored until the reseacher clearly understood what was meant and how these private experiences were linked to the professional biography.

The *trustfulness* in the research relation also has ethical implications. The data provided by the respondent had to be handled with discretion. From the start we emphasized that the data would be treated anonymously and in a confidential way. We made special efforts to guarantee that the identity of the respondents wouldn't be released. Therefore we consequently used pseudonyms or general descriptions to make the data anonymous, without diminishing their informative strength and clarity. Perfect anonymity however, cannot be obtained (Plummer, 1983, p.144). This once again created a dilemma. On the one hand we had to protect the respondent's anonymity. But on the other hand we needed extensive quotations of the story to underpin our conclusions. Especially if one wants to show the interplay of biography and context, thick descriptions are necessary and demand extensive information. We tentatively solved the dilemma by presenting in the research report only the information needed to ground our interpretations, while using pseudonyms and codes for names and places.

The problem of *deceiving or exploiting* the respondents (Plummer, 1983, p.143-145; Thomas, 1992, p.6) was avoided by correctly informing the respondents from the beginning about the aims of the study and the concrete research procedure (see above). The quality of the research relation, as discussed above,

was a further guarantee for an ethically correct research process. By using forms of communicative validation (see further), we also provided the opportunity for the respondent to control the data and the way they were made public.

The quality norms in biographical research

The quality of a scientific study normally is assessed in terms of reliability and validity, as a specification of the more general demand that it must be possible to repeat a study while getting to the same outcomes (repeatability). Since both criteria stem from quantitative and positivistic methodology, one could argue that a qualitative, biographical researcher should not bother about them at all. Although we stress the narrative and constructivistic character of our data and the hermeneutic nature of our analysis, we do believe that the requirement for validity and reliability should also be used in this kind of studies as guidelines for methodological quality.

Reliability refers to the "repeatability" of the study and to the degree the research outcomes are independent from the research procedure. In our study the *"research scenario"* (Kelchtermans, 1990) was an important means for creating openess about the research procedure. In this document the research procedure was extensively described and legitimated for. The *research log* functioned as a complement for the research scenario: there the actual research process was documented. This way it is possible for outsiders to trace back the entire research process and the interpretive procedures which lead to the outcomes. Scenario and log contained a detailed description of the selection criteria and actual selection procedure for composing the research group; the different techniques for data collection; the coding procedure (Denzin, 1970, p. 240; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p.38-40; Plummer, 1983, p.89-91). We are aware that the reliability of the study would have been better if it had been carried out by a research team. During the pilot study (Kelchtermans, 1993b) this was the case and there we experienced the advantages of "team triangulation" (Measor & Sikes, 1992, p.224).

In the research log the researcher also documented his own activities and reflections during the research process. This way it became an important instrument for controlling the *subjectivity* of the interpreting researcher (Deshkin, 1988). Intuitions, feelings, assumptions were (as far as possible) thematised and written down, to have them available during further steps in the analysis of the data. This subjectivity is an inherent element in interpretative research. As we have already indicated, the person of the researcher is the most important research instrument (Bergold & Breuer, 1987, p.40). Only a systematic and documented reflection process can control that subjectivity and avoid that it biases the research process (Denzin, 1970, p.11; Fuchs, 1980, p.341-343).

Apart from describing the research procedure, we also contributed to the reliability by making explicit the conceptual framework that guided the data collection and interpretation (see above; also Kelchtermans, 1993a and 1993b).

An important further step in enhancing the reliability is the use of *triangulation*. Triangulation means that several different research methods or techniques are used in the study of the same phenomenon. This way the shortcomings of one method can be compensated for by using another (Denzin, 1970, p. 300-310). In our study we used data triangulation in time, space and person. We gathered data over a longer period of time (several interview sessions and observation visits); at different locations (classroom, school, private home) and with different respondents (at least two colleagues of the same school; the principal). Further we collected data at the level of the individual respondent as well as at the level of interacting individuals (during the observation of the school life). Also the data type (oral, written, observed) was triangulated: we used documents, interviews, observations, informal talks and interviews with other informants.

Validity refers to the question how far the collected data and the insights distillated from them, represent reality. The concrete question in our study was: is the reconstruction of the professional development (in terms of professional self and subjective educational theory) based on the career stories, a correct representation of the way the respondent perceives that development? Can we convincingly argue for the plausibility or credibility (Guba, 1981, p.84ff; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 43ff) of our reconstructions? Several aspects of our research procedure supported the validity. The research period for every respondent encompassed about three months. Because of this relatively long period of time we were able to collect data in several settings and at several moments. This way we could also control for reactivity and researcher effects. Because of the repeated contacts atypical respondent behaviour because of the researcher's presence, was reduced. We also controlled for researcher effects through the lenghty research period, through the systematic reflection in the research log, the explicit instructions in the research scenario and the unobtrusive use of data collection techniques (Denzin, 1970, p.243; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p.46-47; Measor, 1985, p.73-77; Measor & Sikes, 1992, p.212).

Of course the validation of the research findings was also enhanced by the *triangulation* (Measor, 1985, p.73; Woods, 1985, p.17). By combining ethnographic observations and retrospective interviews, we were able to confront the reconstructions based on the interviews, with the findings of the observations (e.g. the content of the subjective educational theory). During AN2 we also did a systematic control for internal consistency (Plummer, 1983, p.104; Woods, 1985, p.18). The interviews I1 and I2 included questions on the same topics, but differently formulated. The answers on both series of questions were compared. When inconsistencies were found in the different data, they were included in the respondent specific part of the final interview and discussed with the respondent.

The most important technique for validation we used was the *communicative validation*: the researcher tries to show the validity of his interpretations by feeding back the results to the respondents and negotiating a consensus about the interpretations (Van Ijzendoom & Miedema, 1986, p.503; Terhart, 1982, p.153-154). Above we described how we gave the respondents the opportunity to react extensively on our reconstruction of their career story by feeding back the synthesis text. During the writing of this text, we

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tried to stay as close as possible to the respondent's spontaneous narrative talk (metaphorical, anecdoti-
cal, descriptive).

If a respondent didn't agree with the text, we asked her to substantiate her critique and to propose an
alternative formulation. These amendments were included in the final Professional Biographical Profile.
Several respondents said spontaneously that they "recognised" themselves in the text.

The value of communicative validation thus depends on the research relation and the way the finding of
a consensus about the interpretation is actually carried out. Legewie is right in stressing the importance
of critically analysing the research situation as a starting point for every validation (Legewie, s.d., p.10).
That is the reason why we paid so much attention to the researcher's role, the research relation and
the permanent reflection on it during the data collection.

However, the quality of the communicative validation can be threatened in several ways. Because of his
social prestige, it is possible that the researcher forces his interpretations upon the respondent. Because
the researcher writes the text, he is in a privileged position to shape the narrative and its interpretation
(Terhart, 1982, p.154 and 1985, p.457; Thomas, 1992, p.7). A solution is the combination of "consensual"
(communicative) and "empirical" validation. The latter implies the testing of the interpretation by predicting
future behaviour from it and researching that future behaviour (Terhart, 1985, p.455-457).

Validity is and remains an important concern for researchers, whether they use qualitative methods or not.
We learned that explicit reflection on validity in qualitative (biographical) research procedures, made us
more conscious about its complexity and relevance. We believe that sharing the thoughtful ways of
handling these "eternal" questions among researchers. constitutes a main road to improve the quality of
(qualitative) research.

CONCLUSION

As a way of summarizing and taking up the four questions guiding the discussion in this symposium, I
would say: yes, narrative inquiry is appropriate in educational research if one is interested in
educational processes and how they are percieved and given meaning to by the people involved.
Because of their narrative character, the research data provide accounts (constructions) of teachers'
career experiences, contextualised in time (biography) and space (cultural and structual professional
environment). This way an in-depth understanding of teachers' learning an development, becomes
possible, that acknowledges its idiosyncratic, contextualised and complex character. The richness and
the specific textual structure of the narrative accounts can not easily be obtained by other methods.

However, in order to claim the status of "proper research", narrative-biographical research has to account
for its methods and procedures. The methodological justification of narrative-biographical research as
research basically draws on the same arguments as other forms of qualitative research. Data have to be
collected and analysed in a careful, systematic way, that must meet the demand of "repeatability" (i.c.
detailed description of the different steps in the research procedure). The aim of the whole enterprise
remains the construction of "scientific" knowledge, grounded in empirical data (= narrative accounts). This

"empirical grounding" makes the research different from strictly philophical studies or the study of literal texts (fiction). Although the stories by the teachers are of course personal constructions, they can be treated as trustworthy accounts of how past experiences and events have been perceived and experienced by the narrator. The research interest then does not concern the facts as such, but the meaning those facts had for the person involved. And these meanings can change. That's also part of the process of learning and developing. Let me therefore end with this quote from the novel *Haroun and the sea of stories* by Salman Rushdie: *"And because the stories were held here in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories...".*

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NOTES

1. In Belgium the majority of primary school teachers are female. A constant use of both male and fem text puts extra strain on the reader. For both these reasons, we choose to use only the female form in referring to the respondents. Of course every "she" or "her" can be replaced by "he" or "his". When r researcher, we did it the other way around.

2. The interviews took place at the respondent's home. The choice of the interview location was left to th For practical reasons all respondents chose to be interviewed at home. In biographical interviews, importance that the respondents feel 'safe' (e.g. Woods, 1985, p.15). The private sphere of their own hou the school context, enhanced that feeling of safety. This way the researcher also got information (thr observation) of the respondent's life world outside school.

3. Our research procedure is **eclectic**. We were inspired by the literature on the "life history method" (Plummer, 1983; Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985; Woods, 1985); the "Swiss Instrument", developed by in a study on teachers' careers (Huberman, 1989; Huberman, Grounauer & Marti, 1993; Hirsch, Gangui & Elmer, 1990) and by Schütze's work on the "narrative interview" (Schütze, 1983; Südmersen, 1983 a 1979).

4. Some examples of the questions:
- What experiences, persons or events in your life have determined most significantly the way you teac have they been so influential? (= exploring potential critical incidents-phases-persons);

- What characteristics are in your opinion crucial for being a good teacher? (= exploring task percepti educational theory).

5. Every synthesis text contained the following divisions:
   - Professional biography: * formal career
                             * career story
   - Critical incidents-phases-persons
   - Professional self: * self image
                               * self esteem
                               * jobmotivation
                               * task perception
                               * future perspective
   - Subjective educational theory
   - Professional environment: * macro-level (inspectorate, school board, teachers' union)
                               * meso-level (principal, colleagues, parents, in-service training)
                               * micro-level (classroom)

In the final version, three more sections were added:
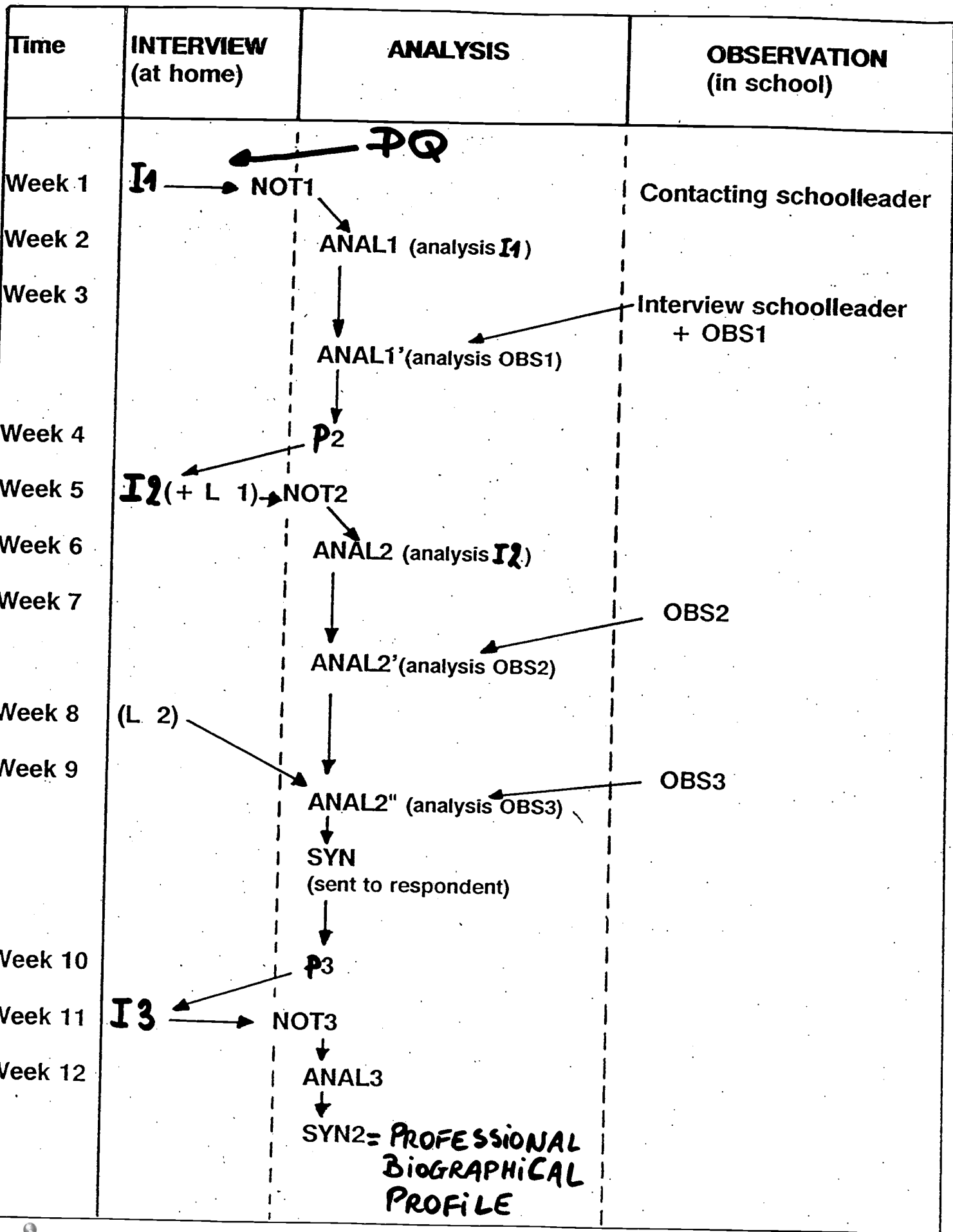   - Text amendments: uttered by respondent during Interview 3
   - Metareflection: reflecting back on the experience of being a respondent in biographical research
   - Notes: comments, reflections etc. by the researcher (based on the research log)

6. This procedure however also has a "negative side". The confrontation with their own, literal statements appreciated by the respondents. They felt ashamed about their poor and clumsy looking language. resulted in anger and once even in a conflict because the respondent felt ridiculed by the researcher. by the researcher of the reasons for the word by word quotation (namely the text was only meant for inte the respondent; because of time pressure better editing of the interviewfragments hadn't been possib sufficient to overcome the resistance or concerns of the teachers. From this experience, we believe it i anticipate these feelings in the letter that accompanies the synthesis text.

7. We gratefully acknowledge the dedication with which Ann Deketelaere took care of this import consuming job.

8. Allport himself made a list of possible motives that could influence the autobiographical story: a) pleadi opinion about himself as a person; b) exhibitionism; c) the desire to order life experiences; d) literary delig the personal perspective; f) relief from tension; g) monetary gain, when participation in the researc rewarded; h)assignment (e.g. autobiographies that are written in a training situation); i) assisting in autobiography written by a client for his psychiatrist; j) redemption and social re-integration (autobiogr of public confession in the perspective of being forgiven); k) scientific interest (e.g. by the autobiograp to the scientific understanding of life experiences and human behaviour; l) contributing to social reform a this in motion by making a example (e.g. in the social policy toward people in the social margins); immortality (Allport, 1942, p.69-74).

Time	INTERVIEW (at home)	ANALYSIS	OBSERVATION (in school)
		PQ	
Week 1	**I1** → NOT1		Contacting schoolleader
Week 2		ANAL1 (analysis **I1**)	
Week 3			Interview schoolleader + OBS1
		ANAL1' (analysis OBS1)	
Week 4		**P**2	
Week 5	**I2** (+ L 1) → NOT2		
Week 6		ANAL2 (analysis **I2**)	
Week 7			OBS2
		ANAL2' (analysis OBS2)	
Week 8	(L 2)		
Week 9		ANAL2" (analysis OBS3)	OBS3
		SYN (sent to respondent)	
Week 10		**P**3	
Week 11	**I3** → NOT3		
Week 12		ANAL3	
		SYN2 = PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE	

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