Studying Teachers' Lives as an Educational Issue

Autobiographical Reflections from a Scholarly Journey

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Setting the Stage

What does it mean to live a teacher's life? What does it mean to be a teacher, to become a teacher, to stay in teaching, or to leave the profession? Why are teachers doing what they are doing the way they are doing it? These questions have fascinated me throughout my academic career as a researcher as well as in my teaching and my work as a teacher educator, an in-service trainer, and a facilitator of school improvement processes. In my address, I will look back on my career and the ways in which I have tried to understand teachers' work lives. These autobiographical reflections of my own academic development are the story of an ongoing effort to grasp and unravel the lives of teachers through appropriate conceptualization, empirical grounding, and theory building, which eventually constitute the best possible basis to design interventions and practices. It was and continues to be a

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fascinating journey. Education was and continues to be "a beautiful risk," as Biesta (2013) rightly labeled it. Making one's own work and professional development the theme of a lecture creates the risk of a narcissistic or egocentric discourse. I hope I'll be able to avoid this by stressing the development in thinking and conceptualization as well as the methodological choices. Furthermore, I will try to situate my work against the broader international developments in educational research on teachers' lives since the 1980s of the last century and, from there, formulate a few elements for a further research agenda.

A final introductory comment: I hope to show that my academic interest in and approach to teachers' lives have not been those of a sociologist, anthropologist, or psychologist but those of an educationalist. What drives me has not only been to understand teachers' work lives as a purpose in itself but eventually always included the ambition and hope to actually contribute to an improvement of the educational practices and to teacher development. Mentioning "improvement," however, immediately complicates things. It automatically brings up the central importance of normative issues and the need to take a stance on what is "good" education, "good" teaching, "teacher professionalism." My stance is that professional teaching and teacher professionalism—as it develops over the time of one's career—require and reflect both *expertise and commitment*, and that teacher professionalism only emerges in *educational practices*. I will come back to those three words: *expertise*, *commitment*, and their emergence in *practice*.

As a consequence, teacher development during their work lives not only entails a technical or instrumental dimension (e.g., how can I make things work?) but also a moral dimension (e.g., the inevitability of making value-laden choices, acting on them, and taking responsibility for them). This fundamental ethical commitment in a relationship of care and responsibility, furthermore, does not leave one emotionally indifferent (Filipp, 1990). And finally, the value-laden choices can and will be contested, and the discussion on criteria and goals results from the ongoing processes of power, negotiation, and influence, thus reflecting also an essentially political dimension. In other words, I agree with Hargreaves's programmatic claim in 1995 that teachers, their work, and their professional development include technical, moral, emotional, and political dimensions that are connected and need to be understood in their interplay. Teachers' lives are lived as situated in particular time-space contexts, and they emerge in and through the enacted practices for which they carry responsibility. This is not the same as accountability (Kelchtermans, 2011), and I am fully aware that believers and promotors in performativity policies—be they policy makers or educational researchers—with high-stakes testing and accountability procedures in many countries, will disagree with my stance on teacher professionalism (Kelchtermans, 2007b).

In the Beginning There Was Puzzlement

In the beginning there was puzzlement.[1] As a master's student in educational

sciences in the early 1980s, I became interested in educational innovation and school reform. In one course—taught by Roland Vandenberghe (Van den Berg & Vandenberghe, 1981), the later supervisor of my PhD—we studied the international research on educational innovation, which convincingly showed how difficult it was to change educational practices and reform schools in a sustainable way. Research had already shown that studying the moment of adopting an innovation did not suffice but that it was crucial to understand the so-called implementation process: the actual enactment of the innovative ideas in practice (Berman, 1981).

However, parallel to taking this course, I was working on my master's thesis on the so-called Jena-Plan movement in the Netherlands (Deketelaere, De Keyser, & Kelchtermans, 1987; Deketelaere & Kelchtermans, 1988). In that work, however, we encountered a very different story of school reform: One that complicated and even contradicted several research conclusions in the literature. The Jena-Plan was a model for a radically innovative school, developed by the German educationalist Peter Petersen during the 1920s–1930s at the University of Jena, in the tradition of the child-centered philosophy of the "New School Movement" ("Reformpädagogik"). Petersen's ideas had been picked up in the Netherlands in the mid 1950s, and when we studied the movement in the early 1980s, more than 250 Dutch schools were working according to this model. Interestingly, however, this innovation had not been imposed or even promoted by the government but was developed bottom-up as an increasing number of teachers and parents became fundamentally dissatisfied with the dominant school system. They found inspiration in the Jena-Plan and decided to start new schools or radically change existing schools. Because they had been trained for teaching in traditional schools, implementing the reform ideas demanded a heavy investment in study and an increase in workload from the teachers and presented a huge challenge to the practices they had become used to. Enacting the Jena-Plan implied implementing multiage class groups, complex innovative pedagogies of differentiation or inquiry-based learning, increased attention to social skills and art education in the curriculum, and so forth. In other words, those teachers almost completely had to give up their professional zones of comfort and embark on the endeavor of enacting very different ideas of teaching and learning. Among the many fascinating aspects of that study, I was particularly struck by the "stories of conversion" many of those teachers told me. Particular experiences in their teaching had brought them to radically question their taken-for-granted practices, forcing them to thoroughly rethink and reconsider themselves and their pedagogies based on a strong sense of moral purpose and emotional commitment. "Owing it" to the children was the line that kept coming back in their stories of what brought them to their innovative practices.

All these experiences left me with a strong sense of puzzlement when graduating and hoping to work as an educational school consultant, supporting school reform. I had come to understand that apart from facilitating technical interventions, providing support materials, and building capacity, implementing educational innova-

tions also demanded understanding the complex processes of sense making, moral commitment, and emotional involvement (for example see also Fullan, 1982; Van den Berg, 2002). And I had come to understand that all of this involves dedication, hard work, and professionalism on the part of teachers, throughout their careers.

Broadening My Conceptual Horizon on Teacher Development

When starting the work on my PhD in 1987, however I discovered that I was not alone with my puzzlement over educational innovation, as it was in interesting ways echoed in the international research literature on teaching and teacher development. Let me outline and clarify the lines of work that helped me move beyond my puzzlement and come to grips conceptually with the complexities of teachers' work lives.

Narrative and Biography in Teachers' Work Lives

Since the mid-1980s, the "teacher thinking" research (see e.g., Clark & Peterson, 1986; Craig, Meijer, & Broeckmans, 2013) argued that teachers' actions could only be properly understood by seeing them as guided by their "thinking," such as their ideas and normative beliefs on teaching, children, and their subjects. Within this broader line of research, many scholars were drawn to theories of narrative and storytelling (e.g., Polkinghorne, 1988) as the prominent genres humans use to make sense of their experiences (e.g., see for overviews Carter & Doyle, 1996; Casey, 1995; Clandinin, 2007; Gudmundsdottir, 1991; also see the edited volume Craig et al., 2013). Storytelling is the natural way through which people make sense of the events, situations, and encounters in which they find themselves: "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2; see also Clandinin, 2007).

Furthermore, many of those researchers explicitly linked this narrative approach to teachers' biographies (e.g., Butt, 1984), thus bridging the psychological interest in teacher cognition and sense making to more sociological traditions. Especially the revival of the life history research (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Goodson, 1984, 1992) as well as studies of teachers' careers and work lives (Huberman, Grounauer, & Marti, 1993; Nias, 1989; Sikes, Measor, & Woods, 1985) created rich opportunities for conceptual cross-fertilization. Although rooted in different theoretical and disciplinary traditions, the central idea in this biographical perspective is that human existence is fundamentally characterized by historicity: People are born at some point, live during a particular amount of time, and then die. Their lives unfold in time between birth and death. Because human beings are gifted with the capacity to remember and make sense of past experiences, their interpretations, thoughts, and actions in the present are influenced by their experiences from the past and expectations for the future.

The idea that teachers, when talking about their professional experiences, spontaneously chose narrative genres and that these stories needed to be understood as situated in the broader story of their work lives became intertwined in what I later labeled the *narrative–biographical approach* to teachers' careers and professional development (Kelchtermans, 1993a, 1994a, 2009).

Understanding the Idea of "Career" in Teachers' Work Lives

A second issue I struggled with was how to properly conceive of the *teacher career*. An important inspiration was the book by Sikes et al. (1985) titled *Teacher Careers: Crises and Continuities*. In line with Hughes's (1958) work, Sikes et al. (1985) defined the career not as a series of bureaucratically determined positions but as "the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions, and the things which happen to him" (p. 1). These British researchers developed a model of career phases (related to age), but in their conceptualization of the transition between career phases, they introduced the interesting concept of *critical incidents*. This concept allowed me to combine the narrative and biographical approaches as well as the central role of sense making, because they defined critical incidents as "key events in an individual's life, . . . around which pivotal decisions revolve. They provoke the individual into selecting particular kinds of actions which lead in particular directions" (p. 57). The stories of conversion of the teachers in the Jena-Plan schools clearly exemplified these critical incidents. They were significant experiences that caused an intrinsic and compelling need to reconsider and revise one's deeply held beliefs and the practices built on them.

Building on but going beyond the work of Sikes et al. (1985) in conceptualizing teachers' lives was the famous study by Michael Huberman and his colleagues in Geneva, the French-speaking part of Switzerland, titled *La vie des enseignants* (Huberman, Grounauer, & Marti, 1989).[2] Huberman and his colleagues combined psychological and sociological approaches to understanding teachers' careers (against the backdrop of a policy environment of far-reaching school reform). Their ambition was not only to reconstruct the career trajectories teachers take throughout the organizational contexts of the schools they are working in, but to go further and unpack how the characteristics of the individuals influenced the organization as well as were influenced by it. In other words, they broke away from a traditional, more passive approach of professional socialization to a more interactive one where individual and organization were seen as both influencing and being influenced by each other: "comprendre comment les caractéristiques de ces personnes influent sur cette organisation et, en même temps, en subissent l'influence" (Huberman et al., 1989, p. 13). Properly conceptualizing, empirically grounding, and understanding this mutually influencing interaction of individual and organization became one of the central threads in my own research, as an instance of the fundamental issue of the relation of agency and structure (Kelchtermans, 1994b).

Different from the career model developed by Sikes et al. (1985), Huberman and colleagues (1989) used extensive interview data on teachers' professional lives to identify different career phases as well as different patterns or trajectories in which they were lived through: no longer development through phases in a fixed order but an understanding of individual careers as a personal trajectory in which the order of the phases could differ. "We have come to see that many patterns once attributed to age-related influences are in fact as much or more the result of 'cohort' or 'period' influences, which means that historical or sociological factors need to be counted more heavily" (Huberman, 1989, p. 31). That is one of the reasons why this study became so groundbreaking. In Europe, it immediately inspired other researchers, such as Hirsch, Ganguillet, Trier, Egli, and Elmer (1990; see also Hirsch, 1990, 1993) in the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland and Terhart, Czerwenka, Ehrich, Jordan, and Schmidt (1993) in Germany.

The Issue of Teacher Identity

Almost all the work on teachers' lives—regardless of its theoretical roots—involved issues of their "self" or "identity." In 1980, Ivor Goodson had argued that "in understanding something so intensely personal as teaching it is critical we know about the person the teacher is" (p. 69). In 1985, Stephen Ball and Ivor Goodson stated in their important edited volume *Teachers' Lives and Careers* that "the ways in which teachers achieve, maintain, and develop their identity, their sense of self, in and through a career, are of vital significance in understanding the actions and commitments of teachers in their work" (p. 18). This idea was taken on and empirically grounded by Nias (1989) in her book *Primary Teachers Talking*. Nias argued that, when talking about the experiences in their work lives, teachers inevitably brought up their understanding of themselves as teachers: "It was their persistent selfreferentialism which made it possible to construct a generalized picture of their experience. Aspects of the 'self' repeatedly emerged as central to the experience of these teachers, even though each 'self' was different" (p. 5). In other words, my narrative–biographical approach toward teachers' work lives (careers) would need to include an understanding of teachers' professional selves, of who they are and want to be as teachers.

It is interesting here to mention that, parallel to this work in the tradition of interpretative sociology in the Anglo-Saxon literature, similar issues were addressed and discussed in the German literature of the so-called *pädagogische Biographieforschung* (Baacke & Schulze, 1979, 1985; Krüger & Marotzki, 1996; Schütze, 1984): Understanding career as it appears in biographical accounts and drawing on a diversity of philosophical and empirical perspectives, these authors also focused on issues of identity development and (auto)biographical reflection while also making interesting methodological contributions. Since the German *Biographieforschung* not only contributed to theory development but also explicitly

and creatively addressed important epistemological and methodological matters in narrative–biographical research, it was too bad, and in a way even tragic, that little work from those traditions made it into the international discussions, especially since, during the 1980s and 1990s, English definitely took over as the modern lingua franca for educational research in general and work on teachers' lives in particular.[3]

Professional Development From the Narrative–Biographical Perspective

So let me wrap up how these different lines of conceptual and methodological inspiration affected my own work on teachers' professional development from a narrative–biographical perspective. As I have already indicated, my interest in teachers' careers and work lives was and is educational rather than sociological or psychological. Because teachers play a key role in education, their own professional learning and development over time (throughout their career) is a central issue for research in educational science. My interest in the narrative and biographical approach was ultimately driven by the ambition to reconstruct and understand this learning process and to be able to draw on these insights when designing and enacting programs or curricula for teacher education, for in-service training, or for supporting schools in implementing innovations. I defined professional development as the *lifelong learning process resulting from the meaningful interactions of teachers with others, in different contexts*. Context needs to be understood not only as *context in space* but also as *context in time*. In other words, one's present being influenced by experiences in the past and expectations for the future. On the basis of my narrative–biographical research, I concluded that we need to understand the outcome of this learning as twofold—in teachers actions as well as their thinking (Kelchtermans, 2004, 2009). At the level of teachers' professional actions, the result becomes visible in a more complex and refined repertoire of professional skills to draw on when acting professionally. Parallel to the change in actions, however—and this is the link with the teacher thinking research—there is a change in what I have called teachers' *personal interpretative framework*: "a set of cognitions, of mental representations that operates as a lens through which teachers look at their job, give meaning to it and act in it" (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 260). This framework actually guides teachers' interpretations, sense making, and actions in particular situations (context) but at the same time is also modified by and results from these meaningful interactions (sense making) with that context. As such, it is both a *condition for* and a *result of* the interactions and represents the—always preliminary—"mental sediment" of teachers' learning and development over time.

We can link this to what Lortie (1975) called the "apprenticeship of observation": Student teachers enter the teacher education program with about 15 years

of experience in schools and with teachers. On the basis of those experiences, the students have built an idea about what the teaching job entails as well as about themselves as (future) teachers. These representations and motivations determine the way they engage with the teacher education curriculum and learn from their experiences during internships (see, e.g., Rots, Kelchtermans, & Aelterman, 2012). Once they enter the profession, teachers' personal interpretative frameworks will continue to develop throughout the further career.

My research has led me to conclude that in this personal interpretative framework, two different yet interconnected domains need to be distinguished: professional self-understanding and subjective educational theory. *Professional self-understanding* refers to teachers' conceptions of themselves as teachers.[4] The advantage of the word *self-understanding* is that its very form refers both to the understanding one has of one's "self" at a certain moment in time (*product*) and to the fact that this product results from an ongoing *process* of making sense of one's experiences and their impact on the "self." By stressing the narrative nature, the possible essentialist pitfall in conceptualizing "identity" can be avoided. In this view, we should not look for a "deep," "essential," or "true" personal core that makes up the "real" self. The narrative character implies that one's self-understanding only appears in the act of "telling" (or in the act of explicit self-reflection and as such "telling oneself"). The intersubjective nature of the self-understanding is thus immediately included in the concept itself, because the telling that reveals the self-understanding always presupposes an audience of "listeners."

Teachers' narrative accounts of their experiences are not just informative about how they think about themselves. Rather, they construct that self-understanding in the interactive act, at the same time (implicitly or explicitly) inviting the "audience" to acknowledge, confirm, or question and contradict the statement. Narrative accounts revealing one's self-understanding are moments of *interactive sense making*. Because the issue at stake is not a neutral statement but one's self and the moral choices and emotions it encompasses, the narrative accounts always entail an aspect of *negotiation* (seeking recognition or acknowledgment of one's self-understanding; Kelchtermans, in press-a). For example, the value-laden choices in the task perception (the normative component of self understanding) can be contested and questioned, but also offer strong possibilities for negotiating common understandings and shared moral and political choices among colleagues. That is why—as I said before—I conceive of teacher professionalism as encompassing both expertise and commitment.

By the *subjective educational theory*—the second domain in the personal interpretative framework—I mean the personal system of knowledge and beliefs about education that teachers use when performing their job. It thus encompasses their professional know-how, the basis on which teachers ground their decisions for action. *Knowledge* refers to more or less formal insights and understandings, as derived from teacher education or in-service training, professional reading, and so on. *Beliefs*

refers to more person-based, idiosyncratic convictions, built up through different career experiences. If juxtaposed like this, knowledge and beliefs suggest two different categories of information, but in teachers' thinking, they are much more mixed and intertwined and may be better conceived of as the extremes of a continuum. The actual line between knowledge and more personal beliefs is not so easy to draw.[5] The subjective educational theory reflects the teacher's personal answer to the questions, How should I deal with this particular situation? (= what to do?) and Why should I do it that way? (= why do I think that action is appropriate now?). Hence, "using" or "applying" one's subjective educational theory demands first of all a process of *judgment* and deliberation, an interpretative reading of the situation before deciding on which approach may be most appropriate. This judgment is technical and practical, as it involves a concrete situation or problem that requires action yet inevitably reflects also the values and norms one holds (task perception) (see also Biesta, 2013).

Methodologically, I 'operationalized' the narrative–biographical perspective by elaborating a particular qualitative research procedure (a cycle of multiple biographical interviews, in combination with observations; Kelchtermans, 1994a) to elicit teachers' narrative accounts of the experiences throughout their careers and their sense making of them, from which I could eventually reconstruct their personal interpretative frameworks (Kelchtermans, 1993a, 1993b, 2009). To sum up, this methodological approach reflected my *educational* interest in teachers' work lives, a need to understand teachers' learning throughout their career, and the awareness of having to understand educational practices and the people who enact them as contextualized in multiple ways (biographically, geographically, historically, organizationally, and socially). Teachers do not live their work lives in a vacuum. They always work somewhere, at some point in time.

Emotions, Micropolitics, and Vulnerability

An important further lesson I learned from this narrative–biographical work was the pervasive and fundamental role of the emotional dimension in teachers' work and lives. Emotions were omnipresent in the professional biographies. But I came to understand that they were not simply related to teachers' subjective experiences of their job but were more intrinsic to the teaching job itself (Kelchtermans, 1996, 2009; Kelchtermans & Deketelaere, 2016). The emotions, as the bodily felt meanings, were rooted in the moral commitment as well as the political issues of power and influence of teaching and being a teacher. In their daily practices—as I have already stated—teachers have to make numerous judgments as the basis for their actions. These judgments are never merely technical or instrumental, trying to link means and ends as efficiently as possible, but are ultimately rooted in and justified through teachers' care and commitment to the students and as such moral and ethical in nature. Furthermore, they are also always deeply contextualized in the here and now of a particular situation. Although teachers cannot but judge and act on their professional

judgment, they know this judgment can always be contested and questioned by others holding different normative views about what is good, best, and necessary for students. And because these different views are related to different power structures, teachers' work lives are also characterized by a political dimension.

Trying to understand the latter brought me to move my focus from mid-career teachers to beginning teachers and the induction phase. The complex process of new teachers finding their way into the school as an organization is indeed a "critical phase" in the teaching career, involving in an intensified way professional learning (quite challenging for the personal interpretative framework and in particular one's self-understanding) but also political action: negotiation, self-presentation, and so on (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Piot, Kelchtermans, & Ballet, 2010; Vanderlinde & Kelchtermans, 2013).

Integrating the micropolitical perspective (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Hoyle, 1982; Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017; Malen, 1994) in the conceptual lens of the narrative–biographical approach strengthened its analytical power in the study of teacher induction. We found that beginning teachers had a more or less clear idea of what for them were necessary or desirable conditions to do a proper job, *proper* meaning not only effective (achieving results with the students) but at the same time also satisfying (providing a sense of fulfillment, of being able to live up to one's personal normative ideas of good teaching). These necessary or desirable working conditions operated as *professional interests*, triggering strategic (micropolitical) *actions to protect, establish, or restore them* when they were threatened, absent, or abolished. Learning to read situations in terms of professional interests, developing a mastery of micropolitical tactics and strategies as well as the emotional stamina to endure and persist, constitutes what we labeled *micropolitical literacy*, an important agenda in the ongoing professional development of beginning teachers (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017). The different categories of professional interests we distinguished in the analysis of beginning teachers were later confirmed by other authors as well as in other studies (e.g., on leadership and school development and quality control; Kelchtermans, 2007a; Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet, 2011; Piot & Kelchtermans, 2016).[6]

Conceptually integrating the emotional, moral, and political dimension into the analysis of the career stories brought me to argue that the teacher job is *structurally* characterized by *vulnerability* (Kelchtermans, 1996, 2009, 2011). Not being in control of essential working conditions (such as the students one finds in one's class or the colleagues one finds in one's school), not being able to actually prove one's effectiveness as a teacher (and yet having students' outcomes used as "evidence" to evaluate one's professional quality), and, most importantly, lacking an unquestionable basis for judgment (and therefore always finding one's judgments being exposed to possible criticism and contestation) are all inherent to the teaching job. Therefore the vulnerability they compose is to be seen as a structural characteristic of the job and not a personal characteristic of the individual. Through professional develop-

ment, teachers cannot but learn to deal with this reality. As such this vulnerability also constitutes a part of the typical "professionalism" of teachers. Professional vulnerability is therefore not a flaw, a weakness, but the inevitable outcome of the fact that enacting the teaching profession requires not only expertise (knowledge, skills, competencies) but also commitment (care, morals, and ethics) as a person. I think this structural vulnerability is still not fully understood and yet seems to me key to understanding a number of complex issues, such as teacher attrition, resistance to change, teacher burnout, and intensification of the teaching job (Kelchtermans, 1996, 1999, 2009, in press-b).

A Double Conclusion, While Looking Backward and Forward

Agency and Structure

It will have become clear that my work on teachers' lives has always strongly emphasized teachers' agency—as focused on their interactive sense making, their professional learning, and their negotiations and judgments as the basis for their actions and practice. Yet, at the same time, I have always been aware of the need to acknowledge and integrate the role of the structural realities impacting teachers' development and practice. Ivor Goodson's argument in 1984 that teachers' life stories ought to be embedded in broader sociohistorical accounts as life histories has always played in the back of my head. And in 1994—inspired by Anthony Giddens's (1984) *The Constitution of Society*—I phrased the research agenda of my postdoctoral projects in terms of the need to unpack and understand the multiple and complex tensions of agency and structure, or, to be more precise, to understand educational practices (constituting the realities of teachers' work lives) as the outcome of the complex interplay of teachers as sense-making actors, operating in and being determined by structural and institutional realities of schools as organizations, as well as the wider educational system and policy environment (Kelchtermans, 1994b).

In my attempts to deal with it, I broadened my attention from teachers to the other professional actors who operate in the organizational conditions of the school as the enactors of structurally defined roles and positions (e.g., principals; teacher leaders, such as mentors; school counselors; teacher educators) (Kelchtermans, 2007a; Piot & Kelchtermans, 2016; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014). While never giving up my effort to empirically base and justify my research interest in data, obtained by qualitative research methods, allowing me to grasp those actors' contextualized sense making, I have applied and explored the potential of different theoretical lenses to capture their structural and institutional embeddedness. Drawing on Michael Apple's (1986) "intensification thesis," we looked at teachers' experience of increased work load and how that was mediated by the organizational working conditions in schools.; Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008, 2009). We applied neoinstitutional theory and routines theory to unpack implementation processes of innovations, with particular attention

paid to the role of artifacts as material carriers of innovative, normative frames (März, Kelchtermans, & Dumay, 2016; März, Kelchtermans, Vanhoof, & Onghena, 2013; März, Kelchtermans, & Vermeir, in press). In the study of educational artifacts, we also applied frame analysis (Vermeir, Kelchtermans, & März, 2017), which we used as well in analyzing decision making by the principal teams in school clusters (Piot, 2015). In our work on the professional development of teacher educators, we explored the possibilities of positioning theory (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014), which we are now extending to teacher induction (as a complement to the micropolitical perspective and network approaches).

Carefully listening to and thus acknowledging teachers' voices, the narrative sense making of practitioners, have been and remain the starting point in my research on teachers' lives. But at the same time, I think researchers can and should add conceptual layers of understanding by embedding this sense making and the practices as situated in and determined by broader and larger meaning systems, power structures, and policy measures (see, e.g., Lanas & Kelchtermans, 2015; März et al., 2016; Simons & Kelchtermans, 2008).

Looking back on these studies—I now realize—they are actually all related in their effort and ambition to analytically addressing the interplay of factors at the macrolevel of policy making, the mesolevel of the school as an organization, and the microlevel of the individual teacher and his or her professional development (e.g., in the first phases of his or her career). Although it remains both conceptually and methodologically quite challenging, I think this research agenda is vital for appropriate theory development on teachers' work lives, as committed and competent professionals, but also to deepening our understanding of important issues like teacher attrition and retention, supporting the implementation of educational innovations, or providing really professionalizing professional development opportunities for teachers throughout their careers.

I have to say that I am often struck and worried by the lack of attention to the structural and institutional factors in the curricula of teacher education and in-service training, with their emphasis on practical executive skills instead of critical, theory-based reflection and responsible judgments. All too often, student teachers are still trained to professionally conceive of themselves as primarily (and/or even exclusively) working with children or youngsters on a particular curriculum content in a classroom, with little understanding of how organizational and institutional processes determine who they are or can be, what they can strive for or think they can strive for (see also Kelchtermans, in press-b). These practices, of course, reflect the equally narrow ideas on what constitutes the core of the teaching job for many teacher educators, other educational professionals, and—as a consequence—policymakers and news media. Research on teachers' lives should be at the forefront of the struggle to break these naïve and stereotyped views, which not only don't do justice to the complexity of the job, but also continue to provide legitimacy to the widespread unfair blaming and

shaming by policymakers and news media of individual teachers as the cause for weak learning outcomes (Kelchtermans, 2007b).

Language Issues in the Study of Lives

My second, and final, conclusive and prospective issue concerns language, multilingualism, and their relevance for the research on teachers' lives. As a European researcher, working also in an officially trilingual country and situated in a wider European context with very different languages and cultures, I have always been and over time have become even more aware of the meaning and impact of language and linguistic issues in our work. This is even more crucial for qualitative research on teachers' work lives, where experiences, sense making, and aspects of self-understanding are so central.

I suppose we can all agree that language or linguistic structures are fundamental and essential in processes of sense making. If we claim to do justice to teachers' experiences and accounts of their work lives as central in our research, we cannot turn away from the empirical, epistemological, and methodological, but also deeply ethical and political, relevance of language as well as multilingualism. The bulk of international research collaboration happens in English, and this self-evident fact automatically creates a dichotomy between native speakers and nonnative speakers. I will not go into the fundamental issues of cultural hegemony, the strategic advantage in and control over the authoritative publication facilities, the advantage in the competition on obtaining research funds, and so on. Let me just mention a few of the issues or questions that, in my opinion, warant attention here:

• What happens to narrative or biographical data when they are being translated to English to get published or to allow for international collaboration? Given the illustrative and argumentative role in reports on qualitative research, the very idea of "translating" is so much more complex than simply replacing words with their semantic equivalents from another language. Let me give one example. The word *zelfverstaan* (self-understanding) in Dutch is at the same time both a noun and a verb and as such in its very linguistic form confirms and strengthens the message that teachers' sense of self is continuously developing over time. In my first publications, I used "sense of self" or "self" as the English equivalent, and it was only when sharing with Betty Achinstein (a native English speaker) my doubts and frustrations over losing the extra layer of meaning and rhetorical strength in translation that she suggested using "self-understanding" as a valid possible alternative in English to capture and preserve as much as possible the layers of meaning in the Dutch word.

• Can a nonnative speaker ever be sure that he or she has really properly translated the message and conveyed the meaning of narrative data to an international audience? Does the audience really get the message? For example, the

concept "task perception," my translation of *taakopvatting* as the normative component of self-understanding, has on several occasions created confusion with international readers, who, for example, understood "task" more as an identifiable "to-do" or duty (one of many that could be listed in job descriptions) rather than as the overall normative agenda through which a teacher ethically positions and commits himself or herself in the job as well as against the formal and informal job demands and the view on "good teaching" they reflect. In the latter meaning, it further becomes much easier to understand also the political relevance of the concept, instead of merely its ethical or moral sense.

• How is international collaborative research using qualitative data and methodologies affected by the fact that the collaborating colleagues are using English because they have a different mother tongue and no mastery of each other's languages (and therefore also no direct access to each other's data sets)? When I was working in Finland and Vietnam, for example, I experienced the actual distancing, even exclusion, from not having direct access to the data or the narrative sense making by teachers. It is good to notice that this complex and urgent matter is getting more attention recently. I just mention the recent PhD research of Erkki Lassila, who has worked as a Finnish researcher on the experiences of Japanese teachers in their induction phase (Lassila, 2017) and has added interesting reflections on the language issue (including self-evidently also broader cultural elements) in his research process. He reflectively recalls both problems and advantages in being the outsider, the foreigner, the one-who-does-not-fully-master-the-language (and its cultural complexities).

And—to close the circle and get back to Huberman's work—one could also link this matter back to the observation of the different language (English, German, French) circuits in which the research on teachers' work lives developed in Europe (and maybe also elsewhere in the world). I think that the confrontation of these different circuits, with the very different theoretical and epistemological traditions and frameworks on which they draw as well as the diverse empirical contexts in which they take place, with the work in the Anglo-Saxon world would constitute a very powerful and intellectually challenging impetus for further development of theories on teachers' work lives (Kelchtermans, 2008).

A Final Word

Teaching, and education in general, is definitely a profession, a job worth spending one's life on: the daily investment of expertise and commitment in enacting one's practices, driven by care for the child, the youngster, the student; having to judge and choose, having to plan but knowing that there will always be happening both more and less than one had planned for; enduring and embracing the vulnerability that goes with it. It is work and life, something we should not forget, despite the, in my opinion,

deeply troubling worldwide proliferation of educational policy regimes, with high-stakes testing and a multitude of procedures and measures in which performativity logic reduces the educational endeavor to an obsession with measurable effectiveness and efficiency as the only relevant criteria. There is so much more to teaching and education. In my own work, I have tried to find a language and an understanding that does justice to this richness and to keep the conversation open and ongoing. Giving a talk like this makes one feel old. Yet, I still want to end with some words of hope as I found them in the final verses of Tennyson's poem *Ulysses*:

> Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
> We are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Notes

[1] This paragraph and the next are slightly revised versions of Kelchtermans (2016, pp. 32–34).

[2] It is important to stress that this study was done in the mid-1980s, with the original book report published in 1989 in French—the English summarizing translation of the book, titled *The Lives of Teachers*, was not published until 1993.

[3] Oppositely, there was a clear influence of the Anglo-Saxon research on the German-speaking academic world, which was further facilitated by the translation into German of several seminal English publications (see, e.g., Terhart, 1991; Terhart, Czerwenka, Ehrich, Jordan, & Schmidt, 1993).

[4] Shulman's (1987) concept of "pedagogical content knowledge," for example, can be understood as part of the subjective educational theory (see, e.g., Depaepe, Verschaffel, & Kelchtermans, 2013).

[5] I have purposefully avoided the notion of "identity" because of its association with a static essence, implicitly ignoring or denying its dynamic and biographical nature (as well as the inflation of multiple meanings, constructed from multiple and very different conceptual and theoretical approaches).

[6] This exploration of the emotional dimension of teacher induction using both narrative and micropolitical lenses was also a central line in the collaboration with Eila Estola and other colleagues at the University of Oulu in Finland, where I held a visiting professorship between 2012 and 2016 (Jokikokko, Uitto, Deketelaere, & Estola, 2017; Uitto, Kaunisto, Kelchtermans, & Estola, 2016).

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