Chapter 11

THE AUTHENTIC TEACHER

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1 INTRODUCTION

That teachers’ personal characteristics are of great importance to the quality of teaching is old educational wisdom. Several classical educational writers, e.g. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and J.F. Pestallozzi (1746-1827) stressed the importance of the personality and the moral qualities of teachers (see Castle, 1970, for an excellent overview). Modern philosophers of education like O. F. Bollnow (Bollnow, 1987) and Max van Manen (van Manen, 1991) also viewed education as dependent on the qualities of the personal relationship between teacher and children. Several movies like ‘Dead Poets Society’ (director Peter Weir, 1989) have portrayed teachers with extraordinary personal qualities.

Also educational research has been interested in teachers as persons. During the last 100 years, empirical research has tried to identify the most important personal characteristics. During the first half of the 20th century the aim of the research was to construct instruments for selection of students for teacher training. The background was that the teaching profession was considered attractive so that it was relevant to devise the most valid selection instruments to recruit the most promising students for teacher training. This agenda is no longer relevant in most western countries because teaching is no longer so attractive to young students as it used to be and the profession faces a crisis of recruitment.

During the first decades of the 20th century, research focused on intelligence as the most important personal characteristic. Later focus shifted to personality traits. Many research projects were undertaken to identify the personality traits of effective teachers in order to use personality tests to recruit the most promising students for teacher training. Today most researchers seem to agree that the relevant personal characteristics concern the knowledge or competence of teachers.
The purpose of the study was to analyse in closer detail what it is that teachers with a high level of personal competence can do and to develop a concept of teachers’ personal quality. The purpose of the study was to answer the question: What is this unified whole of teacher competence that can be experienced in classrooms of teachers with outstanding personal qualities?

Firstly, the principal features of the research in the 20th century on teacher personality are presented and criticized. Secondly, the main points of the new conceptual framework are introduced stressing the need to analyse how personal competences are developed. Thirdly, the concept of authenticity is proposed as a unifying concept of teachers’ personal competences, and fourthly, the results of the empirical study are presented and discussed.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Research in the 20th Century

Looking at some important scholars of teachers’ personality and competence during the 20th century a change of focus from personality to competence is conspicuous. In the beginning of the century, intelligence tests were the preferred instruments in the search of procedures to identify and select teachers. In the first decades of the century many studies compared teachers’ intelligence test scores to some measure of teaching effectiveness. Most studies found low, none or even negative (!) correlations (Getzels & Jackson, 1963, p.571).

The next personal characteristic to be considered was personality and a lot of projects were undertaken to determine the personality traits of effective teachers. A bibliography from 1950 contains some 1,000 titles of works concerning teacher personality (Getzels & Jackson, 1963, p.506) and Getzels and Jackson’s overview of the research from 1963 is based on more than 800 studies published between 1950 and 1963. Most of this research aimed primarily at identifying instruments for selection of students for teacher education.

Many studies of teacher personality used a standard personality test as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory to identify the personality traits of effective teachers and to select promising students. Only a few studies actually evaluated the validity of the predictions. The results were disappointing and the conclusion was quite clear: students’ future success as