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Teachers' interpretations of their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils' best interest: A perspective from continental European pedagogy

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Chapter 6



**General conclusions
and discussion**

Chapter 6

General conclusions and discussion

6.1 Overview of the thesis

This thesis set out to answer the compound question formulated in the general introduction: *‘How do teachers interpret their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils’ best interest?’* Two empirical studies were conducted. The first study (Chapter 4) addressed the sub question: *‘How do teachers legitimise their daily classroom interactions in terms of educational values and ideals?’* The second study (Chapter 5) explored the second sub question: *‘How do teachers give expression to the legitimisation types when interpreting their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils’ best interest?’* Differences in ways of giving expression to the legitimisation types between teachers and different institutional contexts were taken into account. Before the research questions could be answered, two methodological problems had to be addressed. The first concerned how to collect empirical data that is suitable for inquiring into teachers’ interpretations of their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils’ best interest (Chapter 2). The second methodological problem revolved around how to identify teachers’ educational values and ideals that underlie these interpretations from the perspective of continental European pedagogy (Chapter 3). The next subsection summarises the main findings and conclusions of the thesis.

6.2 Synthesis of the findings and conclusions

The two methodological problems were addressed in two successive studies. The first study focused on the development of a method to enable understanding of teachers’ interpretations of the inherent moral significance of their classroom interactions. The repertory grid application (Kelly, 1955) seemed at first sight an adequate tool for this complex assignment, as it is especially designed to explore and understand how people make sense of a particular part of their experience. However, the ‘life world’ perspective adopted in this thesis challenged some important aspects of the standard repertory grid technique. A life world perspective, which is an essential element in phenomenology, implies that teachers’ educational values and ideals form an inherent part of their everyday classroom interactions. Consequently, every classroom interaction, whether intended or unintended, can be interpreted in terms of its moral impact. This led to the development of a repertory interview procedure, which can be considered a phenomenological elaboration of the standard repertory grid application. The main conclusion was that the modifications to the standard repertory grid technique fostered the collection of rich data that served the purpose of understanding and describing teachers’ inter-

pretations of their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils' best interest in subsequent stages of the research project.

The second methodological problem was addressed in a study that revolved around the question of how to identify teachers' educational values and ideals that underlietheir interpretations of their classroom interactions in the interview data. The tradition of continental European pedagogy offered a fruitful perspective to explore this question. A descriptive framework was developed, which served the purpose of mediating between theoretical concepts and the empirical data collected in the study. This framework was based on Imelman's question (1995, p. 60), which could be considered the central object of study in continental European pedagogy: 'Who should be taught what, when, how, and why?' The different aspects ('who', 'what', 'when', 'how') of this question were used as the components of the descriptive framework. During an iterative process of data analysis, two complementary components emerged from the data, i.e. the 'where' and 'for what purpose' components. The 'why aspect' of Imelman's question, which formed an integral part of all six components, enabled a further analysis of the interview data, in terms of how teachers substantiated what they considered to be in their pupils' best interest. Taking the match between the components and the interview data into account, we concluded that the descriptive framework fostered an adequate connection between concepts from continental European pedagogy and the interview data.

The results of the methodological studies made it possible to conduct two successive empirical studies to answer the two sub questions. The first sub question, i.e. 'How do teachers legitimise their daily classroom interactions in terms of educational values and ideals?' was addressed in the first empirical study (Chapter 4). When interpreting their classroom interaction in terms of their pupils' best interest, teachers used different 'legitimation types'. A legitimisation type in this study entailed a systematic description of a particular pattern of educational values and ideals that teachers draw upon. The following legitimisation types were distinguished: (1) a caring legitimisation type, (2) a personal legitimisation type, (3) a contextual legitimisation type, (4) a critical legitimisation type, (5) a functional legitimisation type, and (6) a psychological legitimisation type.

The second sub question, i.e. 'How do teachers give expression to the legitimisation types when interpreting their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils' best interest?', was explored in the second empirical study (Chapter 5). Four themes upon which teachers differed from each other when interpreting their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils' best interest were found: (1) extensiveness, (2) substantiveness, (3) thoughtfulness and (4) answerableness. The most significant findings with respect to these themes were that the majority of teachers involved in this research project: (1) included a small range of components and legitimisation types; (2) tended to have a rather instrumental 'here and now' focus; (3) had a closed way of considering different legitimisation types; and (4) answered for their teaching conduct in terms of what they personally feel responsible for when interpreting their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils best interest. Furthermore, the results indicate that teachers in special secondary education: (1) involved a broader range of components and legiti-

sation types; (2) were more perceptive towards pupils' extended social contexts; and (3) had a more open way of deliberating when interpreting their classroom interactions than teachers in the other contexts involved in this study. Finally, the findings indicate that teachers working within the same institutional context tended to have a similar outlook on what served their pupils' best interest.

6.3 Discussion

The results raise a number of issues that require further exploration. The first issue addresses the educational significance of the typology of legitimisations. The second issue concerns the relationship between particular ways of drawing upon educational values and ideals and pupils' best interest. The third issue relates to the more fundamental question of whether what is educationally desirable is just a matter of opinion.

6.3.1 The educational significance of the typology of legitimisations

A legitimisation type gives expression to what serves pupils' best interest from a particular educational perspective. It could be argued that matters of content and direction are intertwined within a legitimisation type. By asking teachers to interpret dilemma-laden situations from their own practice, they had to reflect on the content that was presented in these situations. Subsequently, by recursively asking why teachers considered particular content to be in their pupils' best interest, questions of direction also came into play. Consequently, the typology of legitimisations gives a detailed account of both content and direction with regard to what serves pupils' best interest.

Because of these qualities, the legitimisation types could contribute to bringing questions of content and direction back into discussions about education, questions such as: 'What serves pupils' best interest at a particular moment in a particular situation, and why?' Scholars such as Socket & LePage (2002), Mahony (2009) and Gholami & Husu (2010) have argued that the teaching profession has become uncomfortable about using a vocabulary that addresses questions of substance and purpose. The dissolution of substantive language in education has often been equated with the rise of an evidence-based model for professional action (e.g. Atkinson, 2000; Blackmore, 2002; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall & Cribb, 2009; Saevi, 2012). Biesta (2010b) argues that the cause of this development is the 'learnification' of education: 'Learnification' refers to the transformation of the vocabulary used to talk about education into one of 'learning' and 'learners' (p. 18). Biesta elaborates this claim by arguing that learning is an individualistic term, which dissociates the purposeful relationship between the person educating and the person that is educated. In addition, Biesta argues that learning is essentially a process term: 'It denotes processes and activities but is open – if not empty – with regard to content and direction.' A similar argument can be made with regard to terms such as 'what works', 'school effectiveness', and 'quality assurance'. With-

out connecting questions of content and direction to process terms, they remain empty vessels, and do not have any educational meaning.

The typology of legitimisations could contribute to discussions about, for example, ‘adaptive learning’, ‘inclusive education’ or ‘raising standards’ by exemplifying the kind of substance and directions that are at stake from an educational perspective. For example, teachers who predominantly draw upon the functional legitimisation type, which is directed at preparing pupils for future achievements by emphasising the importance of study skills, acquisition of formal curriculum content and attainment of a good work ethos, are likely to position themselves differently in a discussion about ‘raising standards’ in schools than teachers that mainly draw upon a caring legitimisation type, which focuses on pupils’ survival in a demanding world, their attainment of self-esteem, self-acceptance and regulating their emotions.

The term exemplifying is not meant in the sense that teachers should adopt particular legitimisation types, in order to justify their teaching conduct. If this was the case then the typology of legitimisations would become a prescriptive moral framework, indicating how teachers should legitimise their classroom interactions. Exemplifying here means that the typology of legitimisations provides examples of language that can be used to address issues of content and purpose in educational practice. After all, no prescriptive framework can relieve teachers of the responsibility of exercising judgement about what is good or bad, right or wrong for a particular pupil in a particular situation (cf. Ponte, 2012).

6.3.2 Pupils’ best interest

The legitimisation types that teachers draw upon when they interpret their classroom interactions can be considered particular ways of understanding what teachers perceive to be in their pupils’ best interest. Teachers differ in the way they ponder this complex question. Our results show that teachers that were assigned a closed way of considering different legitimisation types formed the vast majority. These teachers had strong convictions with regard to what they considered educationally desirable. Furthermore, most teachers in this research project were particularly concerned with the instrumental question of who to teach what and how, and they tended to be less concerned about the ‘for what purpose’ aspects of their classroom interactions. At the same time, most teachers tended to focus on the locality of their classroom practice, rather than taking pupils’ wider social contexts into account. On the one hand, this restricted focus in teachers’ educational outlooks might help them to position themselves and find direction in open and unanticipated situations. A classroom context can clearly be considered such a situation. It is, for example, largely unknown what pupils will learn from teaching activities. In the end, teaching activities constitute opportunities for students to respond and, by responding, pupils might learn something (Hansen, 1999; Burton & Chapman, 2004; Biesta 2006). A consistent focus may help teachers to reduce the complexity in their everyday teaching practice and could help them to put their efforts into the technical aspects of their teaching, which in them-

selves are imperative for their teaching practice. On the other hand, having such a consistent focus in one's educational values and ideals might close off in advance particular ways of seeing what is educationally worthwhile. It might even cause teachers to conceive their educational values and ideals as decontextualised principles that run the risk of becoming unresponsive to pupils' actual needs. Yan and Chow (2002) give an insightful account of the pressure exerted on Hong Kong students by the examination system and the teachers who are part of that system. After arguing that a certain level of pressure might spur young people to get the most out of themselves, Yan and Chow write: 'Yet, from a pedagogical point of view, it can be argued that there are values embedded in our conventional practices that allow adults to ignore the stresses and quality of students' lived experience, and turn a deaf ear to their problems and difficulties' (p. 148). Inevitably, the question of what is educationally worthwhile will always be influenced by historical and cultural contexts (cf. Hansen, 1999). From an educational point of view, therefore, each educational practice should be subjected to questions of substance and purpose again and again, as exemplified by Yan and Chow.

The argument here is that closing off ways of considering and understanding pupils' best interest might lead teachers to have an impoverished orientation towards educating pupils. An open mind, not hampered with rigid ideas about what serves the pupils' best interest, might be conditional for really taking their best interest into account, at particular moments, in particular situations. This is not to say the teachers should have a naïve child-centred educational outlook, disconnected from substantiated views on mankind and educational objectives (Boyd, 1964; Ponte & Ax, 2009). Biesta (2006, 2010b, 2011b) argues, by drawing on Arendt (1958), that teachers should be receptive to the 'unique' and the 'unforeseen' that pupils can bring into world, without discarding their own educational dispositions. Thus the challenge for teachers is, on the one hand, not to leave pupils to their own devices and, on the other hand, not to have unyielding educational outlooks that constrain continuous inquiry into how pupils can be understood (cf. Robertson, 2000). This ambiguous and perpetual task is worthy of teachers' very best efforts.

6.3.3 Educational values and ideals; a matter of like or dislike?

In this thesis teachers' interpretations of their classroom interactions were explored from teachers' individual perspectives on what they considered to be in their pupils' best interest. Personal construct theory, which underpins the repertory interview developed in this research project, primarily focuses on how individuals make sense of their world. An important reason to adopt this theory was that educational values and ideals that underlie teachers' classroom interactions could be considered as something that teachers are personally committed to and identify with as professionals (cf. Ruyter & Kole, 2010). Following this 'individualistic' line of reasoning, one might conclude that educational values and ideals are a matter of personal like or dislike. If values and ideals are perceived as a matter of personal choice, then on what basis could anyone object? Burwood (1996) refers to this

standpoint as an ideology of extreme subjectivism: ‘Within this ideology all values are regarded as being equally acceptable, no viewpoint is judged to be wrong and a “shop window” approach to moral beliefs has become the norm’ (p. 415) However, if a teacher is convinced that substantial differences of treatment between the sexes serves pupils’ best interest, it is difficult to maintain, at least in Western societies, that this point of view is equally as acceptable as any other point of view. Burwood argues that in education only those values and ideals should be promoted, which ‘...either are socially valuable in that they contribute to the maintenance of a liberal society or are deemed to be educationally valuable (or both)...’ (p. 421) For example, in liberal-democratic societies educational ends should, one way or another promote autonomous thinking, discussion of complex arguments, freedom of speech and emancipation (cf. Apple & Beane, 1995; De Winter, Janssens & Schillemans, 2006; Biesta, 2006). A further elaboration of Burwood’s point will be given by drawing on Gilabert’s (2005; see also Ponte, 2012) account of public reasonable deliberation. According to Gilabert, public reasonable deliberation requires both substantive and procedural principles.

Substantive principles are important because the elaboration of such principles, in terms of common substantive ideas such as solidarity, equality and freedom, provides a basis for evaluating particular substantive claims (cf. Clark, 1990; Campbell, 2008b). For example, the more consistent a substantive claim is with common substantive ideas, the stronger the claim is. In this regard, Gilabert claims that people involved in public reasonable deliberation should subscribe to particular common substantive ideas in order solve moral problems consensually. Procedural principles are important because the actual interpretation of particular substantive claims in concrete situations will not automatically lead to consensus. A democratic procedure will be needed to reach an outcome that is acceptable to all those affected (cf. Habermas, 1981).

Connecting Gilabert’s account of public reasonable deliberation to arguments about what, in complex interaction situations, serves pupils’ best interest, and why, could help to distinguish the force of the better argument from the force of custom, faith or coercion (Scott & Usher, 2011). Teachers need to articulate their educational values and ideals in order to evaluate them in terms of, for example, their consistency with the ways in which solidarity, equality and freedom are elaborated in continental European pedagogy. The different theoretical positions within this scientific discipline provide different substantive ideas about what children have in common as members of the human race and human society, what kind of human beings they should become, and how they can be raised towards becoming such human beings, what the educational needs are in society etcetera (Ponte & Ax, 2009). At the same time, it seems evident that substantive claims about what, according to teachers, serves pupils’ best interest will not immediately lead to general agreement. Procedural principles, which could be made practical in peer review sessions or open debates, are conditional for an outcome that is acceptable to all those affected.

To sum up, this thesis advances that teachers’ educational values and ideals are not a personal matter. It also argues that in order to justify substantive claims about what is educationally desirable, claims need to be subjected to public reason-

able deliberation, incorporating both careful articulation of these educational values and ideals (substantive principle) and of how they are subjected to legitimate disagreement (procedural principle).

In the end, public reasonable deliberation is not a practice that ends arguments through everlasting agreement. On the contrary, it functions to keep arguments about what constitutes good education vibrant, dynamic and consequential (cf. Hansen, 2008).

6.4 Implications for teacher education

Three questions can be formulated in connection with the three points of discussion that could help shape teacher education as a place where substantive issues are welcomed. A first point of consideration, linked to the educational significance of the typology of legitimisations, is for teacher education to acknowledge the importance of putting questions of content and direction back on the educational agenda: *a matter of priority*. A second point of consideration, linked to pupils' best interest, is how students teachers can learn to inquire into their classroom interaction in terms of their educational outlooks: *a matter of teachability*. A final point of consideration, linked to the question of whether what is educationally desirable is just a matter of like or dislike, is directed at teaching student teachers the importance of engaging in collegial and public deliberation about the purpose of education: *a matter of responsibility*.

6.4.1 A matter of priority

Teacher education could play a pivotal role in getting questions about the inherent moral significance of teaching back on the educational agenda. Teacher education should not only maintain the current state of affairs but should also focus on the question 'What do we want the future of teacher education to look like, and how are we going to realise it?' Hansen (2008) argues that teacher education not only has functions, which indicate maintenance, but also has purposes, which signify creativity. Hansen continues by stating: 'If a 'purpose' is understood as something envisaged that is to be brought about through human creativity, then it remains legitimate, coherent, and necessary to speak of the purposes rather than merely the functions of teacher education.'

It seems that in the current state of affairs teacher education increasingly connects to a technical model of standardisation, competency matrices, behavioural checklists and rating scale rubrics with regard to the preparation of student teachers, largely ignoring questions of purpose (cf. Bullough, Clark & Patterson, 2003; Van de Ven & Oolbekkink, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Sherman (2006) claims that teacher education does not include enough substantive aspects (such as student teachers' educational values and ideals) of teaching because of their intangibility. According to Sherman, supervision of student teachers is increasingly focused on technical competencies, completing checklists and matching

standards to fieldwork components, which are less subject to interpretation than the inherent moral aspects of teaching. The latter are more difficult to recognise, and assessment of these aspects requires scrutiny. It is doubtful, however, whether teacher educators are adequately equipped to evaluate the ambiguous moral dimensions of teaching (cf. Socket and LePage, 2002; Mahony, 2009). Sherman's main concern is that a one-sided focus on technical competences such as instructional planning, lesson implementation, and assessment design '...make it more difficult to develop a language of moral practice that is explicitly connected to preparation of new teachers' (p. 51). The point here is not that technical competencies are futile in the preparation of teachers; inescapably, they do form an important part of what student teachers need to learn.

Expertise, skills, competence, objectivity, validity and assessment alone do not, however, grasp the essential meaning of teaching. Without problematising the purpose of teaching and its impact on pupils' lives, it amounts to little more than a technical performance with no particular direction (cf. Fenstermacher, 1990; Hansen, 2001; Dottin, 2009; Biesta, 2010a). The non-technical qualities of teaching concerning its inherent moral significance are expressed in questions such as 'How do I understand pupils?'; 'Why is it important that pupils learn particular subject matter in a particular way?'; 'What kind of relationships should I develop with pupils?'; 'What are my outlooks on what kind of human beings pupils should become?' These questions should be given a high priority in teacher education in order to adequately prepare student teachers for teaching in complex, dynamic and indeterminate environments. In line with this argument, Groundwater-Smith, Ewing and Le Cornu (2011) state that: 'Teacher education must reinvent itself so that the complexity of the enterprise may be revealed through sustained debate. We need to go beyond individualism and make critical dialogue a cornerstone of our work. Particularly, we need to eschew the easy fix, which attends only to the immediate and to move to resolutions which themselves may continue to be challenged.' (p.18) Inevitably, social, economic, political, and cultural forces will always influence the priorities with regard to purposes of teacher education. However, whatever the prevailing conditions, teacher educators should consider it their task to help student teachers to understand teaching in richer and more far-sighted terms than a mere technical model has to offer.

6.4.2 A matter of teachability

An important question for teacher education is whether student teachers can develop the capacity to understand their classroom interactions in rich educational terms and how they can be supported in this learning process. Several authors have claimed that this kind of professional action is not a matter of learning particular technical competences, but has more to do with acquiring a reflective and inquiring disposition (cf. Husu & Tirri, 2003; Ponte, 2003; Biesta, 2007; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011). Dottin (2009), for example, connects the concept of professional dispositions, which he refers to as habits of mind, to pedagogical mindfulness and thoughtfulness. Sherman (2006) emphasises the relational aspects of teachers' dispositions by

stating that dispositions are teachers' propensities to conduct themselves in certain ways when they interact with their pupils in certain teaching moments. Drawing on experience from an empirical research project on teachers' educational values and ideals, Biesta assumes: '...the ability to make normative judgements, that is, judgements about what is educationally desirable, is not a rule-based skill, but is more akin to a complex disposition – a way of seeing and being – which can be developed over time through systematic reflection on the normative dimensions of one's professional practice and a systematic exploration of the educational values and ideals at stake.' (2009, p.191) This brings up the question of how student teachers can acquire a disposition that inclines them to consider their pupils' best interest in an educational way.

An adequate response to this question might be that teacher educators should support student teachers to comprehend the educational impact of their classroom interactions, by offering them ways to see their daily classroom interactions in terms of how, if at all, these interactions might serve their pupils' best interest. This kind of inquiry does not imply that student teachers should study academic literature on the moral significance of teaching, separate from their teaching practice. An overemphasis on theory leads to conceptual information without reference to its representation in teaching (Oosterheert and Vermunt, 2001). At the same time, an overemphasis on practice leads to unimaginative and unreflective action (Ponte, 2003). A suitable method should help student teachers to connect practice to theory and vice versa.

The repertory interview method and the findings of this study could serve as a starting point for a systematic exploration of student teachers' educational outlooks in the context of teacher education. To this end, student teachers could be instructed to make a video recording of interactions in a lesson and select specific interaction sequences that they believe contain mini dilemmas, e.g. 'How much of my personal life should I disclose to my pupils?', 'To what extent shall I give pupils the opportunity to influence the lesson plan?' Next, educators could ask student teachers to thoroughly interpret these mini dilemmas using the guiding question that was employed in the present study: 'On the one hand, I think it could be in the pupil's best interest to...; on the other hand, I think it could be in the pupil's best interest to...'. This could start out as an individual assignment and later on student teachers' initial ideas could be discussed collectively. In a subsequent phase educators could ask student teachers to connect their ideas about what they consider to be in their pupils' best interest to the typology of legitimisations or themes with regard to the way one reasons about these substantive matters. For example, if student teachers say that they think it is of paramount importance to have pupils with problematic behavioural patterns officially diagnosed in order to teach them adequately, they might recognise themselves in the psychological legitimisation type. They could explore how far their own ideas match this legitimisation type and how they relate to other legitimisation types as presented in the typology of legitimisations. This could invoke various substantive arguments about what is educational desirable and why. Teacher educators should bring in new and unanticipated perspectives, e.g. from real life teaching experiences or publications in the field. In connection with this point, Hansen (2008) claims

that: ‘...a core purpose of teacher education is to cultivate an open mind towards multiple views of educational purpose, and yet without lapsing into an uncritical or bland relativism...’ (p. 23)

6.4.3 A matter of responsibility

Practising teachers should be able to justify their classroom interactions in terms of educational purposes. They should be able to explain to themselves, pupils, parents, colleagues and others involved what kind of dilemmas they face in their daily classroom interactions, what they consider to be in pupils’ best interest, and why. In other words, when teachers make substantive claims they should be able to justify them. Student teachers could get acquainted with the practice of justifying substantive claims by being initiated into such practices by their teacher educators. Kemmis and Smith (2008) argue that: ‘The teacher educator needs to be a knowledgeable interpreter of educational situations (in terms of what makes them educational), a knowledgeable actor whose educational practice is informed by educational ideas and ideals that have developed and are encoded in the traditions of the education profession, including relevant theoretical knowledge’ (p. 28) These are the kind of teacher educators that can help transform teacher education into a deliberative practice, which aims to contribute to on-going discourses about the means and ends of education.

The legitimisation types could serve as a framework that teacher educators can use to help student teachers to explore their own positions in discourses about what is educationally desirable. The legitimisation types can invoke discussion about which educational values and ideals are worthwhile, the kind of dilemmas that come into play when weighing up different perspectives, and how particular values and ideals can be realised in the daily classroom practice. In terms of the substantive and procedural principles that are connected to the practice of reasonable public argumentation (as put forward in subsection 1.3.3.), teacher educators face a challenging task. Student teachers should be taught that although particular educational ideals, such as equal educational opportunities for all pupils, seem to be generally accepted, the actual interpretation of such an educational ideal in concrete situations will not lead automatically to consensus. Consequently, student teachers will have to learn that their own educational values and ideals are also not objectified truths, but can always be subjected to legitimate debate. Furthermore, teacher educators should point out that educational debates are not akin to uncritical conversations in which all values are equally acceptable. Teacher educators should teach their students to respect the conditions for fair deliberation, to build solid arguments and encourage them to exchange disputing perspectives. In order to participate in such deliberations, teacher educators should initiate student teachers into significant topics of debate, for example: Should education focus primarily on preparation for work and life, academic learning, human development or social justice (cf. Hansen, 2008)? Should teachers’ professionalism connect to a value-based model or an evidence-based model of professional action (cf. Biesta, 2010a)? Are pupils’ interests best served by an

education for all or inclusive education perspective (Miles & Singal, 2010)? It is the teacher educators' task to elucidate the educational philosophies that underpin these debates. For example, with regard to the particular focus of education, i.e. the question 'what is education for?', teacher educators could offer student teachers a framework as formulated by Biesta (2010b), which denotes the functions of education in terms of qualification, socialisation, and subjectification. Being knowledgeable about current educational debates and their substantive backgrounds can help student teachers to become aware of different educational outlooks, justify their own positions with regard to the purpose of education and, as a consequence, take responsibility for their own teaching conduct.

This agenda for teacher education is quite demanding and difficult to implement in an already packed curriculum. However, if teacher educators feel responsible for teaching their student teachers to participate in educational discourse, they will have to find opportunities in the teacher education programme to address this issue. One practical suggestion is to host debates, a couple of times per year, about key educational questions in contemporary society. For example, a topic of debate could be the growing number of children with learning and behavioural disorders that are taught in regular education classrooms instead of special education classrooms. Such a debate touches upon questions such as: 'What serves the child best interest?', 'What are schools for?', 'What can be asked of teachers' professionalism?' In order for such debates to cut through faculty boundaries and have an impact that goes beyond the teacher education institute, they could be organised in cooperation with schools, educational researchers, professional associations, interest groups, and politicians (cf. Ruyter & Kole, 2010; Hansen, 2008). Hosting debates about educational matters will give student teachers the opportunity to subject their educational values and ideals to legitimate disagreement.

6.5 A reflection on the research process

A first point of reflection is connected to the decision to develop a specific research method. The rationale for this decision will be examined by relating the repertory interview we developed to the stimulated recall protocol. A second point of reflection is connected to the question of how the outcomes of this research project connect to the original problem statement.

6.5.1 The rationale for developing the repertory interview

In order to answer the explorative research question in this study: '*How do teachers interpret their classroom interactions in terms of their pupils' best interest?*', one methodological study was completely devoted to constructing a suitable method. The development of the repertory interview procedure made it possible to have teachers interpret their daily classroom interactions in terms of what they considered educational desirable and why. A possible criticism is that developing a research

method is a very time-consuming enterprise especially when, at first glance, there might be adequate alternatives. One possible alternative could have been the stimulated recall protocol. Lyle (2003, p. 861) describes the stimulated recall protocol as follows: 'It is an introspection procedure in which (normally) videotaped passages of behaviour are replayed to individuals to stimulate recall of their concurrent cognitive activity.' Although several similarities can be distinguished (such as the use of videotaped lessons, and reflection on particular classroom interactions), an important distinction has to do with the particular research aim for which the two procedures can be used. In the context of teaching, the stimulated recall procedure is mostly used to make explicit what teachers were thinking during the lesson they have just given. The aim is to collect data about teachers' thoughts during their lessons; they are stimulated to relive their lessons in detail (cf. Calderhead, 1981; Verloop, 1989; Meijer, Zanting & Verloop, 2002). This connects to what Schön (1983) calls reflection in action, i.e. thinking while doing something. The repertory interview, however, aims to collect data about how teachers interpret particular classroom interactions in terms of what they consider to be in the best interest of their pupils and why. Although a particular classroom interaction forms the starting point for the interview, teachers are not so much stimulated to explicate what they were thinking during the exact interaction, but are invited to articulate how the particular interaction could serve the pupils' best interest and why. Moreover, teachers were even encouraged to construct an alternative course of interaction that would have been legitimate in their eyes. This method does not focus so much on determining teachers' actual thoughts about their pupils' best interest at a particular point in time, but rather connects to the possibility that every classroom interaction and its consequences, whether intended or unintended, can be interpreted in terms of its moral impact. The particular interaction is just an elicitor to stimulate teachers to talk about their deep-seated educational convictions guided by recursive 'why' questioning. The data that is collected with the repertory interview is closely connected to what Fenstermacher & Richardson (1993, p. 104) call practical arguments, which they define as: '...post hoc examinations of actions. They are accounts of actions that serve to explain or justify what they did'. This process of data collection is akin to what Schön (1983) refers to as reflection on action, i.e. thinking back on what one has done in order to discover something new.

6.5.2 Addressing the relation between 'what is' and 'what ought to be'

'Continental European pedagogy is a discipline which studies its object not only to know how things are but to know how one ought to act.' (Langeveld, 1969, p.13, translation by the authors) In line with Langeveld's principled position, this thesis set out to investigate how teachers interpret the inherent moral significance of their classroom interactions by asking them to relate their classroom interactions as they are to what they consider to be most desirable for their pupils. The introduction argues that every classroom interaction and its consequences, whether intended or unintended, can be interpreted in terms of its moral impact. In

continental European pedagogy, this principle is closely connected to the relation between the empirical question ‘what is the case’, and the moral question ‘what ought to be the case’. However, this thesis has stressed that debates in continental European pedagogy about what ‘is’ and what ‘ought to be’ are mainly philosophical in nature and not based on comprehensive empirical accounts of classroom practices and, as a consequence, are difficult to connect to concrete classroom situations. The descriptive framework we developed, based on Imelmans’ question (1995, p. 60) ‘Who should be taught what, when, how, and why?’, made it possible to: (1) address the relation between the empirical question ‘what is the case’, and the moral question ‘what ought to be the case’ at the level of teachers’ own understanding of their everyday classroom practice; and (2) inquire into the inherent moral dimensions of teaching from the nature of the work of teaching itself, instead from a source that is external to teaching practice, such as moral philosophy or social and political ideology (cf. Hansen, 1998). Furthermore, the value that this research project adds to current research on the moral dimensions of teaching is that it offers an extensive empirical account of teachers’ educational values and ideals and ways in which teachers draw upon them. This research project complements the considerable body of research on teachers’ moral reasoning that is concerned with small-scale case studies that focus on means to comprehend and describe the moral significance of teaching from a particular moral point of view external to teaching practice (see e.g. Elbaz, 1992; Fallona, 2000; Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Husu & Tirri, 2003). The typology of legitimisations can be considered a systematic description of the various ways that teachers understand the relation between their actual classroom interactions and what these interaction ought to bring about from an educational perspective.

6.5.3 Limitations of the research

A first limitation has to do with the comprehensibility of the perspective from continental European pedagogy in an international context. This perspective was adopted to understand everyday teacher-pupil interactions in terms of what teachers consider to be in their pupils’ best interest. A perspective from continental European pedagogy entails that every classroom interaction, whether intended or unintended, can be interpreted in terms of ‘what is’ and ‘what is more desirable’. At the beginning of the research project we tried to translate this particular perspective by using the term ‘inherent moral significance of teaching’, mainly because we set out to publish the research in Anglo-American research journals. However, an adequate translation proved to be quite confusing, judging from our correspondence with journal editors from the English-speaking world. It is likely that two reasons played a central part in this confusion: (1) in the Anglo-American world the term moral is often and quite persistently connected to an external focus, i.e. something that can be taught to others or should be adopted by others (e.g. moral education); and (2) in the Anglo-American world pedagogy has a instrumental connotation, as it merely refers to teaching strategies or methods of instruction. Later on in the research project we tried to deal with this translation

issue by using the term 'educational' when we intended to refer to a perspective from continental European pedagogy. Arguably, in hindsight it would have been better to use more consistent terminology throughout the whole dissertation.

A second limitation has to do with the kind of statement that can be made on the basis of the research outcomes. As this research project focused on how teachers interpret their classroom interactions in hindsight, no statements can be made about what teachers were actually thinking while they were teaching. All kinds of motives could have played a role during teaching that were not necessarily connected to what teachers considered to be in their pupils' best interest. Teachers could, for example, have been motivated by reasons connected to practicalities, their own interests, or their basic psychological needs. Furthermore, within this research project no correlations can be observed between particular reasons and particular teacher-pupil interactions. For example, statements about the credibility of what teachers put forward as being in their pupils' best interest and consistency with their actual teaching performances cannot be substantiated on basis of the outcomes of this research project. Our research project did not set out to formulate cause and effect relationships. Its added value is that it offers teachers a framework that enables them to (1) understand how teachers in general perceive their pupils' best interest when interpreting their day-to-day classroom interactions; and (2) critically reflect on their own ways of perceiving their pupils' best interest.

6.6 Future research

The scientific aim of this thesis was to understand and describe how teachers interpret their daily classroom interactions in terms of their pupils' best interest. Its findings are in the first place relevant to the group of teachers that were involved in our study; it was not our intention to find statistically generalisable outcomes. However, we did aim to find theoretical insights on the basis of empirical findings, which could contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the inherent moral dimension that is necessarily involved in teachers' professional judgements that go beyond the educational settings involved in this research project.

Further research could help to explore whether the legitimisation types and the way teachers give expression to the legitimisation types proved to be a meaningful framework for understanding teachers' interpretations of their classroom interactions in contexts other than those researched in this study. Teachers that work in other educational settings, such as vocational education, might develop different outlooks on what they consider to be educationally desirable. These teachers work with adolescents and they have to prepare their students for specific vocations, spanning several areas of activity. Teachers that work in this context might have educational outlooks that are especially focused on functional qualifications for the job market. On the other hand, teachers might also involve notions about democratic decision-making across public and private institutions, or considerations with regard to the academic education of their students, in their ways of reasoning about their students' best interest.

Teachers working in other cultural, religious, or ethnic contexts will most probably have other frames of reference, which might lead to other ways of interpreting the inherent moral significance of teaching. The data for this study were collected in a Western culture, which is usually classified as individualist. The nature and the interpretation of the data could have been different if it was collected in more collectivist cultures, as would be the case, for example, in an Asian context (cf. Hofstede, 2007).

An assumption in this research project was that the typology of teachers' legitimisations enables a connection between their accounts of classroom interactions, that serve to explain or justify what they consider in their pupils' best interest, and grand theories, such as the strands in continental European pedagogy. However, this assumption was not put to the test. At first sight it seems that a case could be made that: (1) the caring and personal legitimisation types seem to be closely connected to the *geisteswissenschaftliche* strand; (2) the contextual and critical legitimisation type seems to have most in common with the critical strand; and (3) the functional and psychological legitimisation types seem to be most akin to the empirical analytical strand. However, it would be too superficial to draw the conclusion that these legitimisation types neatly fit such complex and multifaceted theories. An exploration of the way the legitimisation types relate to the different strands in continental European pedagogy, if at all, would require further research.

To conclude, empirical research into how teachers interpret their everyday classroom interactions in terms of their pupils' best interest, in all kinds of contexts, could further perpetual inquiry into the complex relationship between how teaching 'is' and how teaching 'ought to be'.