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Chapter 4 TEACHER AGENCY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF FORMATIVE TEACHER ASSESSMENT³

This chapter focuses on the manifestation of teacher agency during a specific formative assessment procedure: a negotiated assessment on teacher professional learning. It also examines teachers' own experiences of agency. One of the assumptions about making assessment useful for learning is that assesseees (in this case the assessed teachers) are actively involved in the assessment processes and share responsibilities and control with the assessor. The concept of teacher agency is relevant here. It is about making things happen, intentionally, oneself, as opposed to them just happening without one's wilful intention. Agency has also been defined as the extent to which someone feels in control of his or her own actions. However, no empirical evidence has yet confirmed agency in the context of a negotiated teacher assessment procedure. We explored whether teachers who participated in a formative assessment procedure developed a sense of agency, in terms of feeling in control of their learning and assessment processes and feeling able to pursue their learning objectives. In addition, we explored whether agency was manifested in terms of being active in formulating learning objectives, undertaking learning activities and taking initiative during the assessment meetings. Our findings show that teachers experienced a high degree of agency, although this was not consistently visible in the interaction processes during the assessment procedure.

³ This chapter has been submitted in adapted form as: Verberg, C.P.M., Van Veen, K., Tigelaar, E.H., & Verloop, N. *Teacher agency within the context of formative teacher assessment*.

4.1 Introduction

The literature indicates that teacher assessment can be a promising means to promote their professional learning (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). One assumption is that assessment can be useful for learning when assessees (i.e., the assessed teachers) are actively involved in the assessment processes and share responsibilities and control with their assessors (Segers, 2003). This is in line with general literature that indicates the importance of teachers' involvement in their own learning processes (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010). In this study, we used formative assessment to help teachers to plan their learning, identify their strengths and weaknesses, formulate target areas for remedial actions and develop skills to improve their practice (Topping, 2009). Assuming that teachers must be actively involved in order to make assessment useful for learning, we felt it was relevant to explore whether teachers did indeed take an active role during the assessment process, whether they felt able to pursue their learning objectives, and whether they did indeed perceive the learning during the assessment as an active process. The concept of teacher agency is relevant to this. Agency has been described in the literature as a vehicle to give direction to one's career and stay true to oneself (cf. Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, Eteläpelto, Rasku-Puttonen, & Littleton, 2008). It is about making things happen, intentionally, as opposed to just letting things happen. Agency has also been defined as the extent to which someone feels in control of his or her own actions (Metcalfe & Greene, 2007). A *sense of agency* is developed when teachers feel able to pursue their goals within the context of positive and negative interactions within and between internally situated (e.g. colleagues, school context, leadership) and personal (e.g. health, family) factors and external professional factors (e.g. workload, career structure) (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007). Defined like this, agency can be seen as self-evident and *manifested* in teacher learning, if learning is perceived as an active process in which teachers *undertake learning activities* that may lead to a shift in their cognition or behaviour or both. (Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Meirink, Meijer, & Verloop, 2007; Putnam & Borko, 2000). The specific features in this description of learning refer to being active as a learner in formulating learning objectives and undertaking learning activities by taking initiative during the learning process. We explored whether teachers who participated in a formative assessment procedure developed a

sense of agency in terms of feeling in control of their learning and assessment processes and feeling able to pursue their learning objectives. In addition, we explored whether agency was manifested in teachers' learning processes in terms of being active in formulating learning objectives, undertaking learning activities and taking initiative while participating in the assessment procedure. Our study was situated within a particular approach to teacher assessment, i.e., negotiated assessment. In negotiated assessment the assessor and the assessee negotiate about and agree on the feedback provided, the assessment process and the use of the assessment mechanism and criteria, in the light of learning objectives and activities, and they apply these to their own deliberations (Anderson, Boud, & Sampson, 1996). Although the opportunities for active involvement and initiative in negotiated assessment seem promising for teachers developing a sense of agency and for agency to be manifested in teacher learning processes, the concept of teacher agency has not been investigated yet within the context of negotiated teacher assessment. Below, we elaborate on the relevance of the concept of teacher agency within the context of teacher assessment and we describe how negotiated assessment fits with the idea of teacher agency.

4.2 Theoretical background

4.2.1 Teacher agency within the context of teacher assessment

An essential characteristic of making assessment formative and useful for promoting teacher professional learning is the feedback that teachers receive during the assessment (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). The feedback should be focused on teachers' learning objectives and actions, to modify their thinking or behaviour for the purpose of improving learning (Shute, 2008). Feedback in teacher assessment is assumed to be actively adopted by the assessed teachers, in line with literature indicating that teachers' involvement in their own learning process is important (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010). This means that a teacher must be an active agent of his or her own learning during the assessment process. As indicated earlier, agency is the extent to which someone feels in control of his or her own actions (Metcalfe & Greene, 2007). Agency is exercised through action (Earl, 1987) and pursuing goals (Day et al., 2007), and it is mediated by interactions between the individual and the

structures of a given social setting, for example a school (Lasky, 2005). This indicates that agency may be manifested in two ways: a) the participating teachers feeling of being in control of their own actions, in other words: having a *sense of agency*; and b), the extent to which teachers are actively involved and take initiative in the process of setting learning objectives and learning activities. To identify the extent to which teachers experience agency during an assessment procedure and to get a grasp of how agency may be manifested in teachers' participation in assessment procedures, it should first be clear what teachers' learning objectives and learning activities are and how their objectives and activities get shaped during the interaction process (cf. Day et al., 2007; Ketelaar, Bijaard, Boshuizen, & Den Brok, 2012).

An example of an assessment approach in which responsibility and control are shared is negotiated assessment.

4.2.2 Negotiated assessment and teacher agency

In negotiated assessment, control is shared between assessees and assessors, by allowing assessees to negotiate about their learning objectives and learning activities (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999). Assessees are also encouraged to take initiative in their own learning process, not only by negotiating their learning objectives and learning activities with the assessor in light of criteria and standards for professional functioning, but also by negotiating the interpretation of the feedback provided by the assessor (Anderson et al., 1996). Agency in a negotiated assessment procedure may refer to any activity during the assessment process in which the teacher is in control. Agency may be operationalized in the context of negotiated assessment in terms of the teacher setting goals, attempting to negotiate, undertaking actions, or taking initiative in the interactions with the assessor.

Opportunities for negotiation might indeed help teachers to experience a sense of agency in their learning and assessment processes and take this active role, thus manifesting agency in teachers' learning processes during the assessment. However, no evidence is yet available of negotiated assessment processes manifesting agency in teachers' thinking and learning processes. Most literature

reports on negotiated assessment in the context of higher education, in which the teacher is the assessor and the student the assessee (eg., Anderson et al., 1996; Boud, 1992; Boud et al., 1999). Empirical research about how agency may become manifest is lacking. This was why we decided to explore whether teachers who participated in a negotiated assessment procedure developed a sense of agency in terms of feeling in control of their learning and assessment processes and feeling able to pursue their learning objectives. We also explored whether agency was manifested in teachers' learning processes during the negotiated assessment procedure in terms of being active in formulating learning objectives and undertaking learning activities, and by taking initiative during the learning process. Our findings may shed more light on the role of teacher agency during negotiated assessment processes. We conducted an in-depth case study with three teachers. Our aim was provide rich case descriptions and illustrations based on a detailed analysis, so as to illustrate how teacher agency might manifest itself in the context of negotiated assessment. As outlined earlier, to identify the extent to which teachers experience agency during an assessment procedure, and to get a grasp on how agency may be manifested in teachers' participation, the first step is to become clear what teachers' learning objectives and learning activities are and how they get shaped during the interaction process. We therefore aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What learning objectives and learning activities do teachers report having pursued while being engaged in a negotiated assessment procedure?
2. To what extent do teachers experience a sense of agency during participation in a negotiated assessment procedure?
3. To what extent is agency visible in interactions between assessor and teacher about teachers' learning objectives and learning activities during assessment meetings in a negotiated assessment procedure?

4.3 Method

4.3.1 Context

As stated in Chapter 3, this study started in spring 2009 and lasted until spring 2011 and was situated in the context of a two-year negotiated assessment

trajectory for teachers in senior secondary vocational nursing education. The focus of the assessment procedure was on teachers' coaching of reflection skills in nursing students aged 16 years and older.

4.3.2 The negotiated assessment procedure

We developed a procedure for negotiated assessment as described in Chapter 3. Here we summarize the procedure. It consisted of the following elements: 1) a series of assessment meetings which served as a setting for negotiations between assessor and assessee; 2) a teaching competence framework to be used as a starting point for the negotiations; 3) a learning contract in which the learning objectives, learning activities, learning outcomes, and evidence could be described; and 4) the collection of evidence of their own learning practice and of the skills to be assessed. The framework referred to under (2) provided an overview of the teaching competences necessary for supporting nursing students to reflect and was broadly defined in order to provide scope for the negotiation processes.

The negotiations between assessor and teacher were scheduled during three assessment meetings spread over the two-year trajectory of the negotiated assessment procedure. The first assessment meeting took place at the beginning of the trajectory, the second after approximately one year, and the third after almost two years.

Before the first assessment meeting, the teachers produced a draft learning contract containing their learning objectives, learning activities, and desirable learning benefits. While determining the learning objectives, the teachers could use the broadly defined teaching competence framework as a source or guideline. The learning contract was handed out to the assessor beforehand and discussed at the first assessment meeting.

Teachers were asked to prepare themselves and their assessor for the second and third assessment meetings by filling out a learner report about the learning objectives they had been focusing on and the learning activities undertaken to reach the learning objectives. These learner reports were handed out to the assessors before the assessment meetings.

During the assessment meetings, the teacher and the assessor negotiated about the type and the amount of evidence, the learning objectives, activities and benefits, and the teaching perspectives on the teachers' coaching of reflection skills in nursing students.

4.3.3 Training

It was important that the teachers and the assessors understood the idea of the negotiated assessment procedure, so both groups received training before the start. The assessors and teachers received a one-day training course on the negotiated assessment procedure in separate groups. Both groups received information about the negotiated assessment procedure, the preparation for each assessment meeting and negotiation. More information about the training is provided in Chapter 3.

4.3.4 Participants

For this detailed analysis of a small number of assessment dialogues, we used the teacher-assessor dyads described in Chapter 3. From school A, teacher Sarah and assessor Charles; school B: teacher Howard and assessor Lizzy; and school C: teacher Giulia and assessor Linda. Years of teaching experience varied between 9 and 30 years, with an average of 17.3 years. See Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 for detailed information about the participants.

4.3.5 Data collection

To answer the first research question, the teachers were asked to report their learning objectives and learning activities while being engaged in a negotiated assessment procedure during two sessions. They were asked to use their learning contract and their learner reports for this. Examples of questions were: "What learning objectives did you focus on?" and "Which learning activities did you undertake?". The teachers summarized their answers on a work sheet. The work sheets were used as one of the data sources. The sessions in which the teachers were asked to report their learning objectives and activities were arranged twice: first halfway through the procedure and second at the end of the procedure. All the sessions were audio taped.

To answer our second research question, questions concerning a sense of agency were asked in both sessions. Example of questions in the first session included: “To what extent is it possible to work on the learning objectives and activities that you as a teacher find important?”; “Do you consider the framework with teacher competences to be a straitjacket or a frame for your own interpretations?” Again the sessions were audio taped, the answers were summarized and characteristic expressions were transcribed.

In the last session, the teachers were asked to score statements such as “This procedure gave me the freedom to determine my own learning objectives related to reflection skills education”, and “This procedure gave me the freedom to decide for myself what learning activities I wanted to undertake for my own professional development”. The scores were: 1) totally disagree, 2) disagree, 3) neutral, 4) agree, and 5) totally agree.

With regard to our third research question, aimed at exploring how agency is revealed during the interactions in the assessment meetings, all nine recorded meetings (three from each teacher-assessor dyad) were transcribed from audiotape. The transcriptions were used as a data source.

To sum up, we used three data sources: 1) the worksheets with the learning objectives and learning activities reported by the teachers; 2) the summaries of teachers’ answers and the characteristic utterances of the teachers with regard to agency; and 3) the transcripts of the assessment meetings.

4.3.6 Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the completed work sheets was used to analyse the learning objectives and learning activities mentioned by the teachers. First, we examined the questions and answers concerning “learning objectives”. We used the three main categories based on the competence framework described in Chapter 2, section 2.4.3, which gives an overview of teachers’ competences that were important for promoting reflection skills among nursing students.

The framework consisted of three competence domains: 1) the primary teaching process of stimulating reflection skills; 2) creating a safe classroom environment; and 3) the teacher as reflective practitioner. Examples of strategies that teachers could use to foster reflection in the first domain were “asking questions” and “giving feedback”. In addition, teachers were expected to listen carefully, be able to estimate their students’ needs and vary the support given accordingly, in order to stimulate students to perform thinking activities by themselves. The teacher could use these strategies in class or in one-to-one conversations.

In the second competence domain, the importance of creating a safe classroom environment supportive of reflection skills development was central. The teacher was also expected to bear student diversity in mind. Examples of strategies that teachers could use were “giving compliments to the student” and “asking, describing and checking the student’s feelings”. These strategies could be applied to a class setting and one-to-one conversations.

In the third domain, the “teacher as reflective practitioner domain”, teachers were supposed to reflect on their own professional learning and teaching with respect to the promotion of reflection skills in nursing students, by recognizing and expressing their own assumptions about reflection skills training and about their own teaching, and by knowing and expressing their own limitations. The “safe environment” domain and the “teacher as professional” domain were considered conditional for the primary teaching process of stimulating reflection skills.

Based on the domains in this competence framework, our coding categories were: *teaching domain*, *providing a safe environment domain*, and *teacher as reflective practitioner domain*.

We used the categories of Meirink et al. (2007) for our analysis. She distinguished five categories of learning activities for teachers’ individual learning in collaborative settings: 1) *doing*, learning activities done without a prior intention to learn; 2) *experimenting*, activities done with the prior intention to learn; 3) *reflecting*, activities to promote reflection on one’s own teaching practice; 4)

learning from others without interaction, for example activities such as reading texts written by others, observing a colleague, and so on; and 5) *learning from others in interaction*, activities characterized by the presence of interaction between people (Meirink et al., 2007). We did not include unintentional learning activities, so we did not include the “*doing*” category in our analysis.

The nine dialogues in the assessment meetings of the dyads were transcribed and covered a total of 147 pages. After reading the raw protocols several times in order to get a grasp on our data, verbalized utterances during the dialogues were marked as separate on the basis of turn taking.

We analysed the transcripts of the assessment meetings in several rounds to obtain information about how agency was revealed in the interactions about learning objectives and learning activities. In the first round we focused on the “learning objectives” and “learning activities” mentioned by the teachers and the assessors. While reading the transcripts, we noticed that the topics “learning objectives” and “learning activities” were not only mentioned explicitly but also implied. When referring to learning objectives and learning activities explicitly, the words “learning objective” or “learning activity” were actually used, for example: “*The learning objectives I have been working on are ...*”. An example of a more implicit reference was: “*How do you plan to manage that next time you see this student?*”.

In the second round, we analysed the transcripts of the dialogues through the lens of agency. Agency in this context was operationalized in terms of the teacher setting objectives and learning activities, undertaking actions, and taking initiative in the interactions with the assessor during assessment meetings. In our analysis of the dialogues, we explored agency in terms of how learning objectives and learning activities unfolded, and in terms of sequences of learning objectives and learning activities. In particular, we examined how the learning objectives and activities got shaped, focusing on the extent to which teachers were indeed actively involved in the learning processes, and took initiatives. For this purpose, we examined the transcripts using guiding questions such as: Who first mentioned the learning objective and learning activity?; How did the

other person respond?; Which changes in learning objectives and activities were made as a result of participating the meetings?; What kind of learning objectives and activities were suggested by the assessors?; How is the follow up after the meeting concerned with the learning objectives and activities, for example did the teacher stick to the objectives?

The first author performed the initial analyses with regard to all the research questions. The coding for the first and second research questions was discussed by the first and second author and only a few statements needed to be coded differently. Only one learning activity had to be re-coded. Regarding the coded learning objectives, a specific learning objective related to the guidance of a student was coded differently by the two authors. This occurred five times in total. Agreement was easily reached each time by checking the original data from the worksheets and discussing the coding of the disputed objectives and activities.

The coding for the third research question focused on the learning objectives and learning activities and additional analyses of how these objectives and activities unfolded and got shaped. The coding was checked by the second author, based on a reading of the complete transcripts of the dialogues and the outcomes of the first and second round. The second author agreed with the analyses of the learning objectives and learning activities in the dialogues, as well as with sequence descriptions on the unfolding of learning objectives and learning activities in the first author's initial analyses. Only two discussion points (regarding less than 3% of the used utterances) arose with regard to the analyses of how the objectives and activities got shaped. These concerned the initiative by the teachers to discuss the amount of control by the assessor during evaluations in the assessment meetings. Also on this matter, agreement was easily reached by going back to the transcripts of the original data and discussing the coding of the fragments that yielded discussion.

4.4 Results

To identify the occurrence of agency during the assessment procedure, the first step was to become clear about what the teachers' learning objectives and

learning activities were and how the objectives and activities got shaped during the interaction process.

Below, we first describe the learning objectives and learning activities reported by the three teachers on the work sheets during the interviews halfway through and at the end of the procedure. Second, we report on teachers' sense of agency as apparent from the interviews. Finally, based on an interpretation of the analyses of the dialogues during the assessment meetings, we illustrate how agency was manifested in teachers' participation in the negotiated assessment procedure, in terms of their active involvement in setting learning objectives and learning activities.

4.4.1 *Learning objectives and learning activities*

The learning objectives and learning activities mentioned by the teachers on their work sheets were divided among the three competence domains: *teaching domain*, *providing a safe environment domain*, and *teacher as reflective practitioner domain*. For each domain, examples of learning objectives mentioned are provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 *Categories and examples of learning objectives*

Categories	Examples
<i>Teaching domain</i>	Ask fewer closed questions Do not combine three questions into one
<i>Providing a safe environment domain</i>	Do not react too directly Do not be too quick to come up with a solution yourself
<i>Teacher as reflective practitioner domain</i>	Pay attention to preparation for a conversation: what questions and how? Increase your knowledge about reflection and study the theory about reflection in depth

We found that most learning objectives belonged to the “teaching domain” (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 *Number of learning objectives mentioned at three stages of the procedure*

Stage of procedure	Competence domains		
	Teaching domain	Providing a safe environment domain	Teacher as reflective practitioner domain
At the beginning of the procedure	4	3	1
Halfway through the procedure	10	1	2
At the end of the procedure	5	1	1

The teachers mentioned different kinds of learning activities. Categories and examples of the learning activities mentioned are provided in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 *Categories and examples of learning activities*

Categories	Examples
Experimenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changing the preparation of the lesson - Experimenting with different teacher interventions, e.g. different kind of questions
Reflecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Becoming aware of their own teaching practice - Reflecting on their own role as professionals, e.g. by watching the video taped lesson or by writing a reflection report
Learning form others without interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading literature
Learning from others in interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asking/receiving feedback from students - Discussing with colleagues - Discussing with the assessor - Asking/receiving feedback from the assessor on own experiences and/or videotaped lesson

The number of learning activities was not distributed equally over the categories. Half of the learning activities reported belonged to experimenting. See Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 *Number of learning activities mentioned at three stages of the procedure*

Stage of procedure	Categories of learning activities			
	Experimenting	Reflecting	Learning from others without interaction	Learning from others in interaction
At the beginning of the procedure	6	2	1	3
Halfway through the procedure	4	2	-	2
At the end of the procedure	4	-	1	3

4.4.2 *Teachers’ sense of agency*

During the two sessions in which teachers were asked to report their learning objectives and learning activities, we also asked them questions concerning agency. In response to the question “To what extent is it possible to work on learning objectives and activities that you as a teacher find important?”, the teachers’ responses were similar. All three teachers were of the opinion that the focus was really on their personal practice. They formulated their own learning objectives or they deliberately accepted the objectives provided by the assessor. Teacher Giulia, for example, said: *“It is really about my own learning objectives and we talk about that. The focus is on my learning process”*.

In response to the question “Do you consider the framework of teacher competencies to be a straitjacket or a frame for your own interpretations?”, teachers Howard and Giulia gave the same answer. Neither considered the framework to be a straitjacket. They both formulated learning objectives based on their own teaching practice and afterwards they noticed that those learning objectives were in line with the framework. Teacher Sarah did not use the framework at all; she formulated learning objectives based on her own teaching practice and did not check if these objectives fitted into the competence framework.

During the first interview, teacher Sarah made a remark which might be considered exemplary of her sense of agency: *“The assessor may have said*

something and I may have been listening, and perhaps I tried to use it, but the final conclusion to do it or not was still mine. That was a deliberate decision”.

The teachers also scored statements about the negotiated assessment procedure in general. Two statements were related to agency: “This procedure gave me the freedom to determine my own learning objectives related to reflection skills education”, and “This procedure gave me the freedom to decide what learning activities I wanted to undertake for my own professional development”. The teachers agreed with both statements; on a scale of 1 to 5, the first statement had an average score of 4.7 and the average score of the second statement was 4.

4.4.3 Manifestation of teacher agency in the interaction process during the assessment meetings

After having distilled the learning objectives and learning activities reported by the teachers and the assessors during the interaction process, we explored how agency was manifested in teachers’ learning processes, by focusing on how sequences of learning objectives and learning activities unfolded. Furthermore, we examined how the learning objectives and learning activities got shaped, exploring the extent to which teachers were indeed actively involved in the learning processes, and took initiatives. See Appendix C for an extended summary of each teacher’s assessment meeting. In Table 4.5 we first present the characteristics of each assessment dialogue summarized for each teacher. Subsequently, we illustrate the manifestation of agency by interpreting the results of Table 4.5 in terms of how we defined agency in our theoretical framework.

Although the teachers’ dialogues had a similar structure (learning contract, learner reports, evidence and three assessment meetings), the content with regard to the manifestation of agency varied. This was partly manifested by the degree to which the teachers took control and initiatives during the meetings. Sarah’s assessor mainly asked questions and he left it to Sarah to decide what to do next. Howard agreed with most of the assessor’s suggestions but at the end of the meeting he provided feedback about how the assessor had acted. Giulia’s assessor provided suggestions and feedback but the teacher did not take that for granted. Nor did she change her learning objectives based on the assessment

meetings, but only based on her changed teaching practice. For more insight into how agency might become manifested during assessment meetings in the context of negotiated assessment, we elaborate on these examples below.

Sarah

In the first meeting, assessor Charles invites Sarah to tell him about her learning objectives. The teacher tells him what she thinks she is doing well and what kinds of intervention need more attention. The assessor confirms this and takes the initiative to add another point which he says was visible from the videotaped teacher-student conversation. This point concerns the way the teacher asked questions of her students (related to the primary teaching domain). Then the assessor spends a lot of time asking the teacher questions to find out what she thinks about her learning objectives and her teaching practice. The questions also concern the point about her way of asking questions that he mentioned in the beginning of the meeting. The teacher talks a lot about her beliefs and so on. Frequently, while answering a question, she changes the topic and continues on the new topic. At the end of the meeting, the assessor asks the teacher which learning objectives she would like to focus on in response to what has been discussed during this meeting. The assessor gives the teacher the opportunity to reformulate her learning objectives. The teacher replies that in addition to her own learning objective about guiding the student, she will add the assessor's point to her learning objectives.

In the second meeting it is clear that the teacher had stuck to her learning objectives as mentioned at the end of the first meeting. However, regarding one of these objectives, she says that she does not know whether she has changed or is able to change because that particular way of acting is a habit. The interactions afterwards make clear that the assessor's questions are focused on the other learning objective, so the assessor takes her explanation about a habitual way of acting more or less for granted. The assessor asks the teacher what she wants. At the end of the second meeting, the assessor takes the initiative by repeating this answer and suggesting the teacher adapt her learning objective. The teacher agrees with him.

In these assessment meetings it is clear that the assessor provides the teacher with opportunities to take the initiative for her own learning process, by asking open questions such as: *“What would you like?”*; *“What do you need to be able to work this out?”*. He does provide his own opinion now and then but, in general, his approach is to encourage the teacher to talk about her ideas. The teacher takes every opportunity the assessor offers. She frequently drifts away from the topics asked. This seems to be her way of discussing topics which are important to her. The teacher talks a great deal of the time.

Howard

In the first meeting, assessor Lizzy takes the initiative to encourage Howard to adjust his learning objectives mentioned on the learning contract by comments such as: *“I can imagine that you consider this as a separate learning objective”*(64), and *“So that is the reason I am saying: What would it be to have this as a separate objective?”*(68). This concerns a learning objective related to the “teacher as reflective practitioner domain”. Discussing the DVD with examples of the teacher’s teaching practice, the assessor takes the initiative again, by suggesting several learning objectives (related to the “primary teaching domain” and “creating a safe classroom environment domain”) and activities (related to “experimenting” and “reflecting”). Howard agrees with some suggestions but with others he does not agree at first. At the end of the meeting, Lizzy takes the initiative to evaluate the meeting by asking Howard about his experiences. Howard mentions that he experienced the assessor as too guiding and too pushy. In this phase of the process guiding is fine but the next time it should be less guiding: *“Otherwise I get the feeling that you have the responsibility for my learning contract; no, at some point that’s up to me.”*(317). By this remark, the teacher is clearly pointing out his own responsibility for his learning process. In the second meeting, it turns out that Howard had accepted all the suggestions made by the assessor during the first meeting. However, the assessor had also listened to the teacher’s feedback and in this second meeting she is less guiding. Howard mentions two points of attention for his learning. The assessor confirms these and asks questions to find out the reasons behind this behaviour. The teacher adapted the learning objectives based on this meeting. In the third meeting it is clear that he has stuck to his objectives.

Table 4.5 Characteristics of the dialogues concerning learning objectives and learning activities

Assessment meeting	Teacher Sarah	Teacher Howard	Teacher Giulia
<p><i>Assessment Meeting 1</i></p> <p>The assessor asks the teacher about her learning objectives. The teacher mentions them and the assessor agrees with the learning objectives in response to what he saw in the video material. He immediately adds what else he noticed. The assessor persists in asking questions, and leaves it to the teacher to determine the learning objectives and activities with which she is going to work. The teacher takes up the points of interest mentioned by the assessor and adds them as a learning objective. She formulates the accompanying learning activities herself</p>	<p>First of all the assessor and teacher talk about motivation for participation in the trajectory. Then they review the learning contract and evidence. The assessor takes the initiative to discuss the contract. Eventually the assessor leaves it to the teacher to decide what he will do with it. The assessor compliments the teacher on his evidence. She describes what she thought was obvious and asks the teacher if he recognizes it (232) and if he would like to take a look at it (238). At the end of the conversation the teacher indicates that he thought the assessor was directing.</p>	<p>The assessor asks the teacher what she wants to start with. They first discuss the video recording and continue with the learning contract. The teacher explains her learning objectives (122 ff.) and describes interventions (145 + 147) The assessor gives her opinion about reflection a couple of times and about the lesson plan being used. The teacher does not accept it right away and says that she first wants to read more about it (229+259). This restraint is also obvious when the assessor proposes to watch the teacher's video recording (334-337). The teacher does not adjust the learning objectives in response to this conversation.</p>	<p>The learning objectives have been adjusted to the teacher's new educational situation. The teacher and the assessor watch a recording of a lesson together during the conversation. The assessor compliments the teacher a lot. The assessor asks in-depth questions, prompting the teacher to suggest improvements to be made. These are added to the learning objectives.</p>
<p><i>Assessment Meeting 2</i></p> <p>The assessor gives the teacher the opportunity to reflect on her ideas and tries to ask more questions in order to find out what is behind her thinking. The teacher and the assessor both keep coming back to whether the teacher can let go of the students or not. The assessor asks the teacher about the benefits (151). At first the teacher says that she did not learn much that was new. Later she mentions that she learned how to let go but that she has a hard time doing that (176+178). The teacher keeps her learning objectives and adds something in response to the beginning of the conversation.</p>	<p>The learning objectives that have been worked on are discussed. It is evident that the teacher used the assessor's suggestions from meeting 1. The teacher reflects on the educational situation from the evidence. He mentions particular points for discussion and the assessor asks more questions about this. She also asks about the teacher's feelings. Eventually the teacher specifies these two discussion points as his new learning objectives. Just as at the first meeting, the assessor and the teacher evaluate the conversation. The teacher says that he enjoyed the conversation.</p>	<p>The learning objectives have been adjusted to the teacher's new educational situation. The teacher and the assessor watch a recording of a lesson together during the conversation. The assessor compliments the teacher a lot. The assessor asks in-depth questions, prompting the teacher to suggest improvements to be made. These are added to the learning objectives.</p>	<p>The learning objectives have been adjusted to the teacher's new educational situation. The teacher and the assessor watch a recording of a lesson together during the conversation. The assessor compliments the teacher a lot. The assessor asks in-depth questions, prompting the teacher to suggest improvements to be made. These are added to the learning objectives.</p>

Assessment Meeting 3

<p>The assessor lets the teacher reflect on the educational situation as described in the evidence. For example, he asks what objective the teacher had in mind. The teacher mentions herself that “do not fill out” was in her mind, and that the course (NA procedure) is the reason for this (22).</p> <p>The assessor mentions the learning objectives and asks the teacher to reflect on the past 2 years (53).</p> <p>The teacher mentions as a benefit: the tap on the shoulder “do not fill out” during the conversation with the students (54). She notices that she gets more out of the students. At the end of the conversation the assessor reflects back on the influence of the process on the teacher (193). The assessor mentions that he has the idea that it is something minor, that the teacher thinks about that every once in a while, but that it sometimes passes. (197). The teacher does not agree with that. She indicates that she is working on it (198).</p>	<p>The teacher indicates that by looking back at the video, he had crucial moments in which he was very strong but also other moments in which he could have asked more in-depth questions. (66) The teacher and assessor continue talking about the specific student in the video. The assessor gives suggestions for a continuous approach, but also indicates that the teacher himself needs to decide what he will do about it (235+257+317). The assessor indicates that she sees a lot of improvement in the teacher (367) and the teacher picks this up. He reflects on whether he should confront this or not. The assessor confirms that this is indeed a point for attention.</p>	<p>The teacher and the assessor evaluate the video in which the assessor compliments the teacher and gives good examples of interventions (43+107). The assessor continues asking “What are your intentions with that?” She gets the teacher to think. Subsequently, the whole process is being evaluated. The assessor asks “What did you think about it?” (115) The teacher admits that she has noticed the same attitude in herself as in her students (116). It is nothing new to her. “Yes, it confirms things I already knew” (156).</p> <p>The teacher indicates that she is more aware, but that she cannot see if there has been any growth.</p>
	<p>This last meeting is being evaluated. The teacher compliments the assessor on the method of working. The assessor offers to continue to give feedback after this process is over (477). The teacher likes the offer (480) and offers in return that the assessor also can discuss a video of her with him (508).</p>	

Note. Quotations and contributions from teachers and assessors are attributed to particular assessment meetings, with the number of the interaction in brackets after each quotation. This is to provide a verifiable check of the range of transcript material on which the analysis draws.

These assessment meetings clearly show that the kind of questions asked by the assessor determined whether the teacher or the assessor took the initiative. When the assessor took more initiative, she guided the teacher in a certain direction. On the other hand, the teacher was able to express his disagreement with the assessor. Teacher Howard did not agree with all the assessor's suggestions. The assessor indicated that the teacher himself should decide whether to adapt a learning objective or not. In the end, Howard accepted most of the assessor's suggestions. However, it is not clear whether the teacher took control and decided to adapt the suggestion deliberately or not.

Giulia

Assessor Linda offers Giulia lots of opportunities to take initiative for her own learning process. She suggests something to Giulia twice in different ways. The first time, Linda is quite convinced about her opinion. The second time, she is very careful in suggesting a specific learning activity (watching the video together, related to the learning activity "learning from others in interaction"). Giulia does not take the assessor's opinion or suggestion for granted either time (227 + 229, 335+337 +339). However, in the second assessment meeting they are actually doing the learning activity as suggested in the first meeting.

In this second meeting it turns out that the teacher had taken the initiative to change all her learning objectives, due to changes in her teaching practice. The assessor agrees with those new learning objectives. The assessor asks the teacher about the learning activities and suggests another one (related to "learning from others in interaction"). In the third meeting, it is not clear whether the teacher has used this suggestion or not. During the third meeting the teacher mentions her lack of initiative in her own learning process during the assessment procedure. She compares her attitude with her students' attitude.

It was clear that the assessor hardly took any initiative in these assessment meetings. She agreed with almost everything the teacher said or did. She did give her viewpoints several times but the teacher did not take those suggestions for granted. Teacher Giulia took all the initiative to formulate her learning objectives and activities. She did not change any learning objective during or based on the

assessment meetings. Only one change in learning activity, which was initiated by the assessor, was visible during these meetings.

4.5 Conclusion and discussion

This study aimed to examine teachers' agency in the context of a negotiated assessment procedure. As outlined in the theoretical section, agency may be manifested in two ways: a) the participating teachers' feeling of being in control of their own actions; and b), the extent to which teachers are actively involved and take initiative in the process of setting learning objectives and learning activities (Day et al., 2007; Earl, 1987; Metcalfe & Greene, 2007).

All three teachers experienced a strong sense of agency during the negotiated assessment procedure. They formulated their own learning objectives and activities or they accepted the objectives and activities provided by their assessors. According to the teachers, the focus was really on their personal teaching practice, learning objectives and activities, and their choices within these. The focus on personal teaching practice was also visible in the objectives and activities reported. Half of the learning activities reported belonged to the category "experimenting" (activities done with the intention to learn, Meirink et al, 2007) and most learning objectives belonged to the "teaching domain" (learning objectives related to strategies that teachers may use to promote reflection such as "asking questions" and "giving feedback").

With regard to the extent to which teachers are actively involved and take initiative, we explored the interactions about the teachers' learning objectives and learning activities during the assessment meetings. We concluded that the person who takes the initiative varied. For example, the specific questions asked by the assessor offered more or less opportunity to the teacher to take initiative. We also concluded that the visibility of agency fluctuated during the meetings. In the example of teacher Howard and assessor Lizzy, the assessor took initiative during the first meeting. However, this direct way of taking initiative might have challenged the teacher and given him an opportunity to stand up for his point of view (Munneke, Andriessen, Kanselaar, & Kirschner, 2007) and disagree. In our data, the disagreements were not always obvious, for example when a teacher

did not accept the assessor's suggestions during the assessment meeting but it often appeared in the next meeting that the teacher had accepted the assessor's suggestion after all. It was not clear to us in those cases whether the teachers had made a well considered judgment or not. Additional data is therefore needed for future research. For example, a *stimulated recall interview*, in which teachers explicate what they were thinking in response to the videotape of an assessment meeting they had just had. This might allow teachers' interactive cognitions to be examined (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002)

We concluded that the teachers experienced a high degree of agency, although this was not consistently visible in the interaction processes during the assessment meeting. Although these results seem contradictory, a possible explanation for our findings, following from the definition of teacher agency, might be that teachers' sense of agency does not refer directly to specific elements (like the assessment meetings) but to the procedure as a whole or a disposition. The teachers in this study were involved for two years, in which three sessions took place.

During the training much emphasis was placed on teachers' agency, by referring to their opportunities to negotiate, but also by offering the teaching competence framework (described in Chapter 2) as a guideline for formulating their own learning objectives. We emphasized that this framework leaves enough scope for their own interpretations and these interpretations might be discussed with the assessor. We also emphasized the importance of teachers' own teaching practice. Perhaps knowing that you have the opportunity to negotiate or having the possibility to accept or reject assessors' feedback, to decide whether to use the competence framework or not, and so on, is sufficient to experience a great sense of agency.

In general, it seemed that the sense of agency was closely connected to the negotiated assessment procedure, though it is difficult to point exactly to what constituted the sense of agency. For example, when an assessor suggested an additional learning objective, we could not trace from the interactions if the teacher had or had not deliberately accepted or rejected an objective suggested

by the assessor. Additional information would be needed to get a clear picture of a teacher's motives.

A plausible hypothesis that this study generates is that it is not so much the actual actions of the teachers involved that give them this sense of agency, but rather the general role expectation that they should be actively negotiating their own learning objectives and activities. Perhaps agency is not so much about participants in assessments taking initiatives but more about them getting or having a certain amount of responsibility or control in their own learning and assessment processes (cf. Hargreaves et al., 2002; Samaras & Gismondi, 1998). Getting more insight into what happens in assessment processes, including various formal and informal aspects, and how these processes are perceived by participants, may be important for getting a further grip on how active involvement of participants and shared control could be realized in assessment processes so as to promote participants' learning.

