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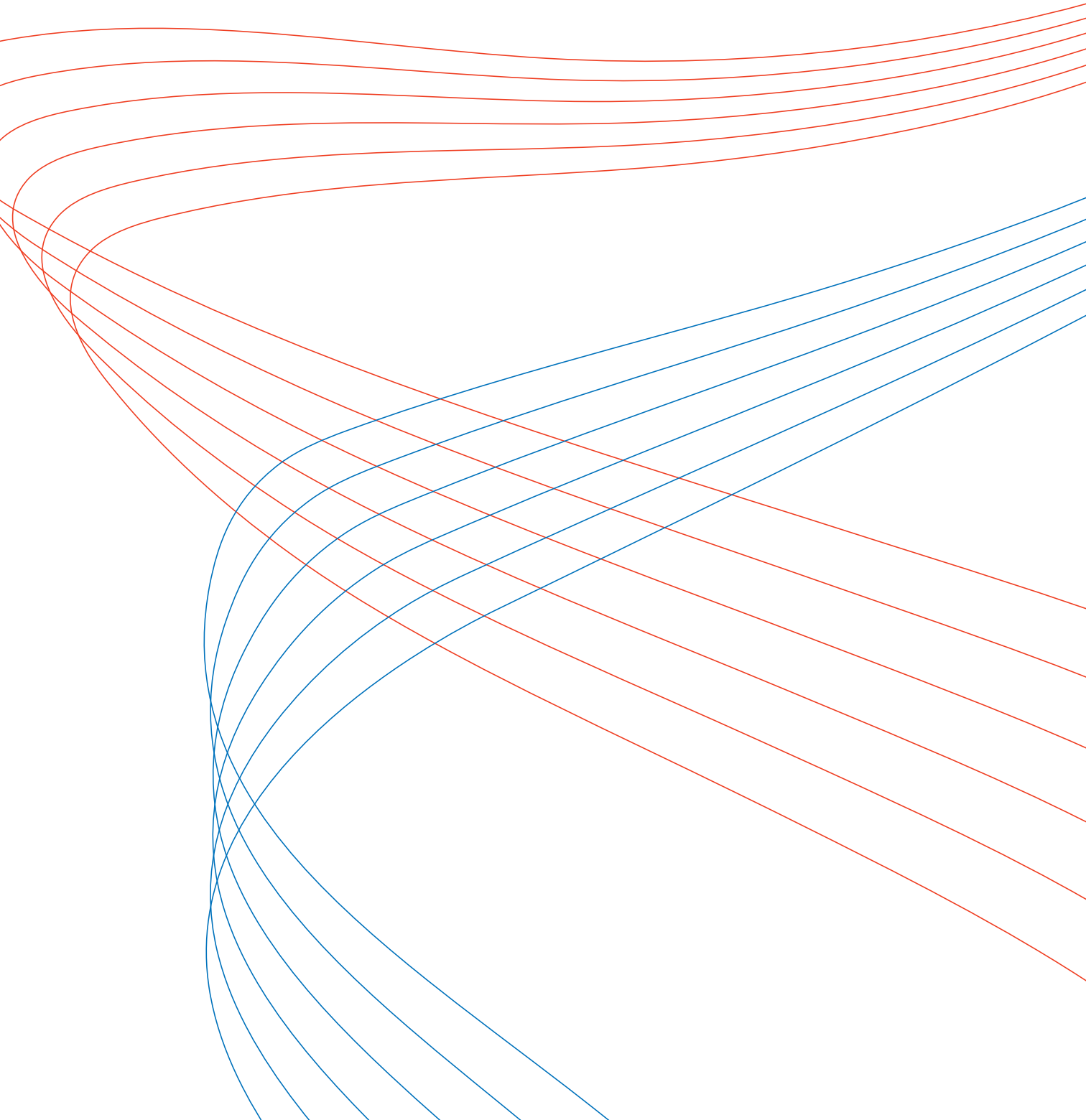
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The Voice of the Teacher. Using Research Solicited Logbooks as a Research Tool in Arts Education

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INTRODUCTION

In primary schools, generalist teachers are responsible for arts education. For this, they may work together with professional arts teachers, use handbooks or other published teaching methods, yet they will also have to rely on their own competencies in the arts. This paper describes the use of Research Solicited Logbooks as a tool to describe and understand how generalist primary teachers deal with teaching art subjects and working together with specialised, out-of-school arts teachers.

Previous research has pointed out that professional development, such as learning to teach a specialist subject, requires a transformative process. In this process, the professional identity of, in our case, the teacher, undergoes a change. This change results in different classroom behaviour and a different conceptualisation of the knowledge and skills that are seen as part of the subject's teacher identity (inside knowledge), and those that are not (outside knowledge).⁹¹ Teacher identity is seen as a subjective, dynamic, and narrative concept.⁹² In order to bring to light changes in this professional identity, it was necessary to find a methodological tool that allowed a form of self-recording which would reveal the development of the teacher's identity. This form was found in the logbook.

THE PROGRAMME

In 2012, the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture, and Science launched the programme Quality Cultural Education (QCE), a programme aimed at stimulating the quality and sustainability of arts education in, mainly, primary schools. The programme consisted of four pillars: the development of more coherent instruments for the assessment of arts education, the development of 'lines' connecting the arts education for children from four to twelve years old, the improvement of the competencies of generalist primary teachers in the arts, and, finally, the strengthening of the collaboration between schools and their cultural environment. The programme was aimed to last for four years, and was continued for another four in 2017, while remaining an explicitly temporary measure, aimed to improve the quality of arts education in such a way that schools and their cultural partners would eventually be able to sustain it.

While the programme was funded nationally (the budgets were matched by cities and provinces), it was intended to be organised from the bottom up. This article is based on a four-year research into the QCE programmes taking place in the province of Gelderland, in the central-eastern part of the country, with 1.4 million inhabitants outside the larger cities, which had their own programmes. The provincial programmes were coordinated by Cultuurmij Oost, the provincial centre of expertise for arts education and amateur arts.

After an initial round of interviews with project coordinators and staff from participating schools and arts centres, a research project was created that focused on the learning process of the generalist teachers. The central role of the teacher was obvious in all projects, as well as within each of the four pillars discerned by the programme. The reason for this is twofold. First, every aspect of the programme ultimately aims at improving the situation in the classroom. Second, being a tem-

porary programme, the effect in the long run must be visible in the everyday reality of the classroom, given the fact that professional art teachers are by and large absent from primary schools. This first finding was also the greatest challenge of the programme: how to support generalist teachers in developing towards this goal, regardless of the context, their professional background, or their personal talents and ambitions?⁹³

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the challenge posed by the QCE programme for teachers, a conceptual framework had to be chosen that would provide insight in the key elements of the process of change the teachers were facing. Transformation Theory, originally proposed by Jack Mezirow⁹⁴, describes the learning process of adults, mainly in professional contexts. This process, in order to be successful, has to start with a dilemma that challenges the beliefs and practices of the professional.⁹⁵ The teacher faces a situation that motivates, be it by push or pull factors, him or her to change everyday practice, and to question the beliefs underlying this practice. In the QCE programme, the generalist teachers are confronted with the professional identity of art teachers. This confrontation with a different professional identity⁹⁶ might, it was hypothesised, trigger such a situation. This situation can subsequently lead to a process of trial and error in acquiring a new set of competencies, and, finally, a new or at least fundamentally changed professional identity. From the vantage point of Transformation Theory, the process of change intended by the QCE programme is an individual process, thus requiring a methodology that would enable to capture the teachers' learning process, their dilemmas, doubts, trials and errors.

Several research methods in use provide the necessary insight in this individual process. Several tools have been developed over the years to record the personal perspective. There are three general types of self-recording methods: personal diaries, professional or educational logbooks, and research solicited diaries or journals.⁹⁷ Personal diaries are used most often in historical and biographical research. Professional or educational logbooks are kept for the sake of work or education, and may be collected afterwards by the researcher, who had no say in the format being used. This is only the case in the last type, the solicited diaries, journals, and logbooks.

The solicited log has several distinguishing characteristics that have made it a relevant tool for this research project.⁹⁸ Because the researcher is absent, he or she cannot influence the data or disturb the context of the experiences being recorded, thus allowing for more personal narratives in the logs. Furthermore, earlier research has shown that solicited logs, like professional diaries, often reveal routine processes, which are generally overlooked in interviews. It may thus shed light on meaning in the making. An additional benefit of solicited logbooks is that they serve as a reflective tool for the subject, documenting not only what happened, but also how the subject looks back on the event.⁹⁹

In diary or journal forms, three basic perspectives may be discerned: interval-contingent, signal-contingent, and event-contingent records. The chosen perspective of the research was interval-contingent. In this case, the participating teachers received

on-the-job training, workshops, and guest lessons from art teachers. They were asked to hand in a log before and after each event, rather than keeping a log on a regular basis or when prompted by the researcher. The resulting event-contingent logbooks offered a perspective on the events that was close in time to the events, thus allowing for little reflection or the evolvment of memories. Earlier research emphasises this as a benefit of solicited logbooks, as they offer details that tend to disappear from personal accounts taking place longer after the events described.

The logbooks were pre-formatted, to create a basis for the teachers in their logs, as well as to ensure a basic comparability in the data. All the while, the teachers were encouraged to deviate from the format, and/or add texts or images whenever they felt inclined to do so. This was regularly done, thus adding a more personal touch of each teacher to the data. The degree to which the teachers personalised their logbooks varied, however. This variance in the use of the logbook format is indicative of the professional identity of the teachers,¹⁰⁰ as will be discussed in more detail below. An independent coder tested the coding of the logs. The agreement in the coding was 20% (0.35 for Cohen's kappa), which is relatively low.¹⁰¹ This is most likely to be caused by the way the teachers filled in their logbooks.

RESULTS

Of the ten teachers who agreed to participate, only seven saw the project to completion. Illness and work overload caused three of the teachers to stop contributing. The logs that were sent in were 291 words on average. The whole data set was 16,618 words, which were analysed using Atlas.ti software. In addition to the logbooks, the teachers, as well as some of their colleagues, school board members, art teachers, and pupils, were interviewed. The interviews with the children lasted 16 minutes on average, those with other teachers and members of the school management teams 32 minutes. Taken together, the interviews lasted 9 hours, 22 minutes and 58 seconds. The information from the interviews served as background information for the analysis of the logbooks.

The format for the logbooks consisted of two parts. The first part focused on the period preceding the event, prompting the teachers to look back on the previous days or weeks depending on the interval between the training sessions, workshops, or guest lessons. The teachers were also asked to make note of their expectations for the upcoming event. For the second part of the logbook, the teachers were asked to describe what they had done and with whom, as well as to describe the roles of all participants. In addition, they were asked to reflect on the events, noting what they found easy or difficult, and pleasant or unpleasant, as well as what they planned to do with the things they learned.

The teachers each chose, either consciously or unconsciously, his or her own way in writing their logbook entries. Consider this example from a teacher's logbook:

Introduction of the chimes. S. [the music teacher] had brought a whole bag full of it, so every child could play along often wonderful! Did many activities with these instruments and a nice accompanying song. (Log entry, 23 April 2015)

Like many of her colleagues, this teacher responded to the format of the logbook by sticking to its systematic nature with every entry. If asked what had been done, and with whom, that was exactly what she did. Despite several judgements and emotional terms in the description, the logs remained strictly within this format. 19% of the logs were filled in in the exact format that was given to the teachers, and an additional 52% used an adjusted format. These logbooks were sometimes explicitly accompanied by an expressed urge to 'what was intended', as one teacher wrote. In the emails with which the logs were handed in, the teachers asked this despite the fact that in the instructions for the logbooks the teachers were explicitly encouraged to deviate from the format, to change or add items reflecting the events or how they felt about it. Apparently, the teachers felt the need to follow the format and were uncomfortable with doing otherwise.

There were also logbooks with a different perspective. These were structured around the nature of the events, rather than the format of the logbooks. In these, rather meandering, logs, the course of events, and the associations the teacher had formed the core of the entries. At first sight, these logs seem to indicate a more intense learning process from the part of the teacher, such as in the following example:

We have found out that we have too little time, the mill being only one part of the project and there is so much to tell about it. [...] In preparing the lessons I am learning stuff myself, and have found out that the mill is a belt mill and after googling it I know what a belt mill is, too.

After analysing the logbooks, it turns out, however, that there is no great difference with regard to the teachers' learning process in connection to the way they handled the logbook format. There is a parallel between the use of format and the prior engagement of the teachers with the arts. Those who, both in their logbooks and in the interviews, expressed a strong commitment to the arts were more likely to deviate from the format.¹⁰²

A second division can be discerned in the logbooks. This pertains to the authorship style of the log entries. In this respect, the teachers took three perspectives: an individual perspective, a professional perspective, and a team perspective. The former is marked by the use of the first person singular in connection with explicit reflections on the personal connection to the subject. One teacher for instance wrote:

S. knows how to motivate me. I feel more competent and less ashamed for my singing (because S. thinks I sing well).

Other logbooks take a more professional perspective. In these, the events are described in terms of their relevance in class, like in this case:

Regarding the music lessons: see what I can hold on to and record for my own use in class. How does she present notation, how does she handle singing etc.

Two of the teachers, who also acted as team leaders in their school, sometimes took the perspective of their team rather than their personal point of view or the

professional relevance. One team leader wrote, reflecting on a training session he had had with his team:

The remainder of the session is devoted to the lessons we have to develop ourselves. I notice how one of my colleagues worries about the assignment. Together we discuss what it is we have to do.

It is important to note that this team perspective did not result from the fact that the workshop was a team effort, since in all participating schools the team shared the entire process of the QCE programme.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that the semi-open format of the log allowed for personal differences between the teachers. Moreover, the form of the logbooks reveals much more than their literal content, when we look at the logbook typologies and the typology of authorship, which reflect the attitude and professional identity of the teachers. An interesting parallel can be seen between logs in which a personal perspective was taken, and the passing of (artistic) judgements on the events described. It is assumed, though further research is needed on this matter, that this connection affirms the division between inside and outside knowledge. Teachers presumably continue to see art as something outside their professional domain, and therefore are inclined to take a personal rather than a professional view.

The teachers' tendency to stick to the format of the logbooks serves as a warning against an isolated use of logbooks in research. The information has to be supplemented by interviews and observations, to ascertain the validity of the findings. Especially in the case of primary school teachers, the tendency to stick to the protocol may be relatively great, as was suggested by earlier research.¹⁰³ Moreover, this indicates how difficult it is to create a truly transformative learning process with this specific subject group.

FURTHER READING

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