

# Chapter 11

## THE AUTHENTIC TEACHER

Per F. Laursen

### 1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, research focused on intelligence as the most important personal characteristic. Later focus shifted to personality traits. Many research projects were undertaken to identify the personality traits of effective teachers in order to use personality tests to recruit the most promising students for teacher training. Today most researchers seem to agree that the relevant personal characteristics concern the knowledge or competence of teachers.

Only a few research projects have been carried through based on a modern theoretical framework of teachers' personal competences. This paper presents the results of an empirical study of Danish teachers. The purpose of the study was to analyse in closer detail what it is that teachers with a high level of personal competence can do and to develop a concept of teachers' personal quality. The purpose of the study was to answer the question: What is this unified whole of teacher competence that can be experienced in classrooms of teachers with outstanding personal qualities?

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

## **2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Research in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

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

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

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

effective teachers cannot be predicted by personality tests. This conclusion has been confirmed also in a more recent overview of the research (Bolton, 1973).

The Teacher Characteristics Study directed by David G. Ryans (1960) was the single most extensive study using a selection approach. The study had a clear purpose: it aimed at the development of instruments and procedures to be used by the selection for teacher training and for employment and promotion (Ryans, 1960, p.11). The study involved more than 6.000 teachers in the USA and it identified what was supposed to be the most relevant patterns of classroom behavior. Three personal dimensions of teacher behavior in classroom were emphasized:

- Friendly versus aloof;
- Systematic versus slipshod;
- Stimulating versus dull.

One result of the study was the development of an inventory (a self-report paper-pencil test) aiming at finding correlates of classroom behavior so that teachers' behavior in relation to the three dimensions could be predicted from the answers to the questions in the inventory. However, like earlier similar attempts, the predictive validity of the instrument was low (Ryans, 1960, p.256).

The Teacher Characteristics Study was an imposing culmination of the selection-oriented research on teachers' personal characteristics but today it can be viewed also as a monument over a basically fruitless research effort: It seems impossible to develop valid selection instruments. However, the Teacher Characteristics Study was valuable in other respects. It identified the basic patterns of classroom behavior of relevance for the personal aspects of teaching.

In the first edition of "Handbook of Research on Teaching" from 1963 Getzels and Jackson's overview of research on teacher personality was one of the longest articles. The authors' conclusion was quite discouraging: despite a prodigious research effort during half a century very little was known about the nature and measurement of teacher personality and about the relation between teacher personality and teaching effectiveness. It can be viewed as a logical consequence of this conclusion that teachers' personal characteristics were hardly mentioned in the "Second Handbook of Research on Teaching" from 1973 (Travers, 1973).

During the 1970's several researchers pointed out that teachers lacked a teaching culture and a special body of knowledge (e.g., Lortie, 1975). Teachers were thought to have experience but not knowledge or expertise (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986, p.512). This view on teachers' lack of knowledge implied a negative evaluation of the role of teachers' personal characteristics. Lortie considered it a result of lack of technical knowledge

that teachers developed practices consistent with their personality and experience.

About 1980 a new understanding of teachers' knowledge started to influence the research. Freema Elbaz' 1983 work, "Teacher Thinking: a study of practical knowledge" was a pioneer-work (Elbaz, 1983). Elbaz introduced a much more positive view on teachers' knowledge. The practical nature of this knowledge does not make it less valuable, just different from scientific knowledge. Teachers' knowledge is shaped and used in practical situations and the role and purpose of teachers' knowledge is to make them able to make wise practical decisions. She considered teachers' practical knowledge to consist of five domains of which 'knowledge of self' was one.

Research on teacher knowledge and competence has been very extensive since the middle of the 1980s and only a few points of relevance to the personal aspects of this knowledge shall be mentioned:

- The notion of teachers' knowledge has been highly influenced by Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983). As a consequence, teachers' knowledge is viewed as a result of personal reflection and not as an application of general scientific principles.
- Whereas governmental policy in many countries have launched a technical and bureaucratic model of professional development stressing effectiveness and accountability, the research on teachers' knowledge points to complex models of teacher competence including intuitive, personal and emotional aspects (Trumbull, 2001; Wood, 2002) as well as craftsmanship (Kennedy, 2002) or artisanship (Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002).
- Not only the emotional but also the cognitive aspects of teachers' knowledge as the pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) are personal. This knowledge is related to context, sometimes tacit and always based on the reflection on the individual's experience (Hulshof & Verloop, 2002).

It can be concluded from this sketch of the development of the research during the 20<sup>th</sup> century that teachers' personal characteristics *are* important. The most relevant aspect seems to be teachers' knowledge or competence but so far the researchers have not reached an agreement about how personal qualities can be conceptualised as knowledge or competence.

## **2.2 A Modern Conceptual Framework: Development of Situated Personal Competences**

During the last two or three decades, researchers have proposed several concepts designating teachers' personal competence or knowledge. Among the proposals were: 'Knowledge of self' (Elbaz, 1983), 'personal practical

knowledge' (Brutzman, 1991; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), and 'personal competences' (Cogan, 1975). These proposals have got much in common as they focus on knowledge and competence.

When the relevant personal characteristics are viewed as competences and not as personality traits it follows that students cannot be selected for teacher training on personal characteristics. Even if it were psychologically possible to design a personality test to select the best students for teacher education it would not be realistic to use it. The recruitment crisis of the teaching profession has made it necessary to try to *develop* the competences of all teachers (Hargreaves, 1994, 2000). To the classical research on teacher characteristics it was a complicating factor that teacher behavior was a function not only of the individual teacher but also of the situation (Ryans, 1960, p.16) and that qualities needed in one situation were not necessarily identical with qualities needed in another situation. Ryans and contemporary researchers tried to overcome this problem by an additional refinement of their instruments but adhered to the intention to identify general correlates of effective teaching behavior.

Today it is obvious that it is a more fruitful consequence to view teachers' qualities as fundamentally *situated* (Lave, 1988). As teachers' competences are developed during their whole career they are inevitably marked by the circumstances of these experiences. Research on teachers' personal competences must therefore include the circumstances of the development and practise of these qualities.

To view teachers' personal qualities as situated personal competences that can be developed through training and experience is a progress towards conceptual clarity. Still we lack a concept to designate the teachers who have reached an expert-level concerning personal competence.

### 2.3 The Concept of Authenticity

The personal quality of a teacher in the classroom is experienced as a unified whole by students and not as several 'sub-competences' or aspects and therefore it is useful to have a single concept to denote this quality. The only appropriate candidate seems to be the concept of authenticity that was introduced in relation to teachers by Clark E. Moustakas (1966) and Stephen D. Brookfield (1990). They both used the concept about the teachers' relations to their students. To both of them an authentic teacher is a teacher who views students as fellow human beings, not as 'material' for the teaching process. The authentic teacher respects the attitudes and intentions of students and she does not try to manipulate the students but to convince them by giving reasons for her proposals. The authentic teacher does not distance herself from the students by hiding herself behind a detached and

impersonal teacher role but views herself as well as the students as human beings with intentions, feelings and interests.

Although the teacher's relations to students are very important, they are not the only aspect of what we are referring to when we speak of a teacher with excellent personal qualities. As early as the 1960s, the pioneering work of D.G. Ryans identified 'being stimulating' as one of three important personal dimensions of teaching. Ryans suggested that the teacher's relation to the content of her teaching is of equal importance as the teacher's relationship to the students. St. Brookfield, too, viewed the teachers' relation to the content as an important aspect of teaching, but he used the concept of credibility to describe this aspect of teachers' competences. Thus, according to Brookfield, the two fundamental dimensions of a teacher's qualities are authenticity and credibility. However, it seems difficult to distinguish between authenticity and credibility and I therefore propose to use the concept of authenticity to denote a high level of teachers' personal competences in general.

The concept of authenticity was used by several philosophers, for example M. Heidegger (Heidegger, 2001). He made a distinction between a conventional, false, and inauthentic surface level and a true and authentic depth level ('Eigenlichkeit') of being. This existentialist version of the concept is difficult to use for empirical purposes because the 'depth level' by definition cannot be observed. Instead, the present study is inspired by Charles Taylor and his concept of ethics of authenticity (Taylor, 1991). Taylor stressed that authenticity involves:

- A.i creation and construction as well as discovery;
- A.ii originality and frequently;
- A.iii opposition to the rules of society;
- B.i openness to horizons of significance;
- B.ii self-definition in dialogue (Taylor, 1991, p.66).

According to Taylor, authenticity is the freedom to decide for oneself rather than being shaped by external influences (A.i – A.iii). But authenticity also means acting in accordance with ethical values and cultural norms of significance in dialogue with others (B.i and B.ii). Authenticity does not equal freedom to pursue personal predilections. Unless some options are more significant than others, the very idea of choice becomes trivial: "Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands" (Taylor, 1991, p.41).

### **3 THE EMPIRICAL STUDY: METHODS AND MATERIAL**

#### **3.1 Data Collection**

The empirical study was based on observations in the classroom and semi-structured interviews with 30 Danish teachers in primary and lower secondary schools. The teachers were selected by reputation of having a high level of personal-professional competences. People who in their job dealt with many teachers (consultants, school principals, and teachers in teacher training colleges) were asked to supply names of teachers with this reputation. To obtain the participation of 30 teachers, 32 were asked to join the study. The teachers had from one to 34 years of experience with a mean of 17 years; 23 were females.

The selected teachers were observed teaching during one school day and interviewed for about one hour about their views on teaching and their professional development. Purpose of the observations was to describe the competences the teachers practised in the classroom especially in their way of relating to the two basic aspects of teaching: students and content. The observer was non-participating and the method of observation was inspired by the ethnographic approach to classroom observation trying to answer the research question: What is the competence behind the reputation that these teachers had acquired?

The purpose of the interviews was to analyse the teachers' intentions and personal-professional development. The interviews were semi-structured and they were taped and transcribed. Observations and interviews took place in 2001 and 2002.

It is of course crucial for the validity of this study that the 30 teachers really had excellent personal-professional competences. It is not possible to obtain any objective measure of these rather elusive qualities and therefore selection by reputation seems to be the only possibility although not much is known about the validity of reputation – or of other measures of teacher competence (Medley, 1990, p.1348; Millman & Darling-Hammond, 1990, p.182 & 271). In order to enhance the validity the methods were triangulated (Cohen & Manion, 1994) by using both observations and interviews. The analyses of the teachers' conceptions were tested with them during the interview (communicative validity; Kvale, 1996).

#### **3.2 Data Analysis**

The analysis focused on competences, intentions, views on teaching, and aspects of professional development that were common to all the 30 teachers

(except in some respects one or two). This focus is a consequence of the intention to analyse the authentic teacher in general and it does of course not imply that authentic teachers are alike in other respects.

The observation notes and the transcribed interviews were reread several times in search of competences shared by all the teachers. I focused especially on competences related to Taylor's five aspects of authenticity. The analysis resulted in seven categories of competences that all (or almost all) the 30 teachers seemed to master. Authentic teachers have personal intentions concerning their teaching, and when teaching they embody their intentions, their intentions are realistic, they relate to students as fellow human beings, they work in a context fruitful to their intentions, they cooperate intensely with colleagues, and finally they take care of their own personal-professional development.

Three of these competences (personal intentions, embodying the intentions, and having realistic intentions) are related to Taylor's first two aspects (A.i and A.ii). Three other competences (working in a fruitful context, cooperating with colleagues, and taking care of personal-professional development) are close to Taylor's fifth aspect (B.ii). Finally, one of the competences (treating students as fellow human beings) is related to Taylor's fourth aspect (B.i). Several of the 30 teachers broke conventional rules of school behavior (compare Taylor's point A.iii). But not all of them did and therefore unconventional action is not included as one of the authentic teachers' competences.

## **4 RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY: SEVEN COMPETENCES OF AUTHENTIC TEACHERS**

### **4.1 Authentic Teachers have Personal Intentions concerning their Teaching**

All the teachers in the study fundamentally experienced it as a very important and meaningful job to be a teacher. Both in classroom and when interviewed the respondents gave reasons which they personally could answer for concerning their teaching. The interviewed teachers gave their own reasons why the content of their teaching was valuable and everyone of them stated personal views about the purpose of their teaching. These views were not necessarily especially original: most of them stressed the importance of teaching the students knowledge of subject matter and of facilitating their general personal and social development. The important quality was that the intentions were the teachers' own; they were not just the headmasters' intention or the aims of the official curriculum. As one



interviewee said: “I feel that every day requires that I intend something. I am not here just to get my salary. I am here because I intend something and I constantly take up that challenge.” The teachers felt it to be important for them to have good subject matter knowledge and to feel enthusiastic about it. Several of them stressed that a teacher cannot inspire students unless she is inspired herself.

Authenticity is not just to have any personal intention. The intention must be justifiable in relation to general horizons of significance (Taylor, 1991, p.35). Taylor stressed that authenticity cannot be identified as having any personal peculiarity (as for instance green hair). We only view a person and her/his behavior as authentic if her/his qualities can be valued as significant in relation to general cultural values. In this study all the interviewed teachers were able to justify their personal way of teaching in relation to general educational principles. The teachers viewed the students’ personal and social development as important as learning about subject matter: “I am not the woman of the disciplines. I prefer a holistic school.”

## **4.2 Authentic Teachers embody their Intentions**

In his analysis of social and cultural leaders who have influenced the thinking of many people, Howard Gardner (Gardner, 1995) showed that a decisive quality was that the leaders had a central story or message and that they embodied their message. They practised what they preached and so do authentic teachers. At the beginning of the empirical study it was not a part of the observation guide to focus on the energy and enthusiasm of the teachers. But during the observations I spontaneously noted about every teacher that they were energetic, enthusiastic, in a positive mood, or created a positive and work-oriented atmosphere in the classroom or the like. All the teachers showed a high level of energy and were positive and optimistic concerning the students’ learning. They thereby embodied the fundamental message to students: teaching and learning are important and worthwhile activities. Several of the teachers could be said also to embody the message that teaching and learning are not only important but also fun.

All the observed teachers somehow demonstrated their interest in the content of their teaching and their intention to learn more about it. Several of them selected subject matter that had a kind of personal meaning to them, which they demonstrated while teaching. As a teacher said to her class introducing a literary analysis of the text of a rock band: “We start by working on something I experience as interesting and that has a message to you.”

### **4.3 Authentic Teachers' have Realistic Intentions**

All the respondents reported that they at least sometimes had a feeling of satisfaction in their work because they had been able to realize some of their intentions. The majority of them had experienced that if they worked with a certain class for some years they were able to observe that the students' learning of subject matter and especially of social competences had developed in the direction they wanted. "The best experience is feeling that you open new doors to the kids so that they get new possibilities."

In his classical work on teachers, Lortie (1975) stressed that one of the problematic aspects of teaching was that the results are not visible. But this study indicates that at least highly competent teachers who are able to work with the same class for some years do experience results of their teaching.

Why is it an aspect of authenticity to have intentions that are at least to some degree realistic? Imagine a teacher who for several years felt no relation between what she intended and what she accomplished without trying to do anything about it. She clearly could not consider her teaching or her intentions to be important. If she did she would either modify her intentions or try to enhance her competences to realise her intentions.

### **4.4 Authentic Teachers relate to Students as fellow Human Beings**

As mentioned earlier, both Moustakas and Brookfield considered the relations to students to be the central aspect of authentic teaching. This study confirms that the authentic teachers respected the students and treated them as free and reasonable persons although they do not have the same amount of knowledge or experience as the teacher. For instance, a teacher of mathematics stressed that although mathematics was very important to him and was his great interest he respected students who had no interest in the subject and he offered his help to make them pass the exams: "I feel it important to signal solidarity with the students and their experience of math."

### **4.5 Authentic Teachers work in Contexts fruitful to their Intentions**

A further aspect of authentic teaching is that the teacher has endeavoured to work in a context that is fruitful to her intentions. This can be done by developing the conditions at a certain school in a direction favourable to one's intentions or by getting a job at another school. You do not practise

what you preach if you passively accept circumstances that are unfavourable to your message.

With one exception all the interviewed teachers felt that their schools were conducive to the realisation of their intentions as teachers and they considered this experience to be very important: “It means a lot. If you don’t thrive in your daily surroundings you don’t grow, you don’t flourish, you don’t get ideas, you don’t experience joy of working, and you don’t feel like doing things with the kids.”

The only interviewee who did not feel being in fruitful surroundings was a young teacher who had her first job on a school where she experienced that her colleagues did not share her interest in educational matters.

#### **4.6 Authentic Teachers cooperate intensely with Colleagues**

Without exception the respondents reported that their relations to and cooperation with their colleagues were of great significance to them. Some of their schools had formed teams but also at schools without formal teams the respondents viewed cooperation with colleagues as very important: “What cooperation with colleagues gives me is unbelievable. Now we work together in a team for each class. Having good colleagues to talk to is as good as gold.”

The most frequently mentioned reason for this importance was that the respondents viewed colleagues as resource persons from whom they could learn to become better teachers. It is known also from other studies (Eraut, 1994, p.34) that interaction with colleagues is important for learning and professional development. Another reason mentioned was that collegial cooperation is necessary for the development of the school as an institution.

#### **4.7 Authentic Teachers are able to take Care of their Personal-Professional Development**

A high level of personal competence is a result of development and no one but the teacher herself is responsible for her personal development. Therefore an important aspect of personal competence is the ability to take care of one’s own personal and professional development. As the last question in the interviews, the respondents were asked to give advices to future teachers about how to take care of their development. The most frequently mentioned answer was that it is important to experience one’s abilities under different conditions and to gain new experiences continuously: “Any young teacher should have the possibility to work for a year or two at a school where they were not going to stay...I think it might

be good to try out one's possibilities. You really have to face that the first five years are time to learn... You have to find your personality as a teacher, your personal way of doing things."

Several respondents stressed the importance of having fun together with colleagues!

## 5 CONCLUSION

From a theoretical perspective, this study demonstrates that the concept of authenticity is appropriate as a designation of teachers' personal competence as a whole. In the literature, Moustakas and Brookfield have used the concept to describe one crucial aspect of this competence, namely the quality of the teacher's relationship with the students. While Moustakas neglected the role of the teacher as a representative of the content of teaching, Brookfield termed this aspect of teachers' personal competence 'credibility'. However, a teacher relates to students as a teacher *of* something, thus the teacher's relations to students cannot be viewed without taking into consideration the quality of the teacher as a representative of the content of teaching. Therefore, it seems appropriate to use a single concept to encompass the teacher's competence to relate to students as a convincing teacher of a certain content.

Charles Taylor's analysis of the concept of authenticity stressed that the word is used about persons who create something following an intention that is their own, while at the same time acting in accordance with general ethical principles. A teacher worth the name would both intend to build good relations with students and to introduce them to the content of teaching. The personal and professional competence to do so is authenticity in teaching. The present empirical study shows that authentic teachers have developed a personal and realistic intention, are able to embody this intention and to engage in fruitful cooperation with students and colleagues.

From a practical perspective, the results of the study can serve as an inspiration in teacher education and professional development. In the interviews, the teachers were asked to give their personal recommendations concerning teacher education and professional development to improve their personal competences. Most of them stressed that, in the first instance, it is important that teachers really want to teach. Next to a personal desire or intention, experience is another important factor – which should not be limited to doing the same thing year after year; it is essential to seek new challenges, for instance, by moving to another school. Inspiration, too, is important and all the teachers interviewed relied on colleagues and some also on theoretical developments and new trends in the professional debate on teaching for inspiration.

So far it has proved difficult to find a systematic way to develop the personal aspect of teachers' professional competence as part of teacher education. Teacher educators have been reluctant to work directly with this aspect for fear of coming too close to students' inner feelings and personality. I hope that this study will make it easier for teacher educators to further students' personal-professional development. The study demonstrates that authenticity is neither a matter of feelings nor personality. It is a matter of competence.

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