

Educating teachers focusing on the development of reflective and relational competences

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Abstract A comprehensive research review carried out on behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Education in 2008 concluded that the competence to establish and maintain good teacher–student relations is a central and important one for a teacher in today’s schools. Together with teaching competence and classroom management competence, other competencies that are decisive for learning outcomes include the teacher’s knowledge of and ability to establish relations, to feel empathy, respect and tolerance, and to take an interest in the students and their potential. Nordenbo and colleagues’ findings correspond with the results from other meta-studies, and hence, research quite unanimously concludes that relations matter. However, a closer definition and breakdown into concrete skills is impeded not only at theoretical and definitional levels, but also at a practical level. How can relational competence be described theoretically? And can relational competence be learnt and trained in the context of teacher education at all? In a current development and research project of the Bachelor Degree Programme for Teacher Education in Aarhus, Denmark, we investigate the development of relational competence in both theory and practice. The project is organised and carried out in cooperation between student teachers, teacher educators, qualified teachers and researchers, and this conceptual paper explains the theoretical ideas, implications and perspectives as well as the overall aims and the structure of the project. After a brief introduction to the organisational context, The Danish Teacher Education, the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the project are explained. The project’s overall aim is to break new ground in pedagogical research and teacher education, and the goal is to contribute to the development of theoretical knowledge within this academic field, so that relational competence can be understood and taught as part of ongoing development of teacher’s professional competence.

Keywords Bachelor Degree Programme for Teacher Education · Relational competence · Appreciation · Presence of mind · Empathy

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Table 1 Values in education—teacher’s authority

From	To
Using power	Inclusion
Discipline	Dialogue
Focus on the child’s behaviour	Focus on the relationship
Correcting	Empathy/caring
Adjudicating	Acknowledgement, reflection
Role-dependent authority	Personal authority

1 Introduction

1.1 Teacher education in Denmark—a brief introduction

Schooling and teacher education are subject to public and political scrutiny. As a result, the Danish legislation governing teacher education has been amended four times over the last 20 years. The latest reform came into force in August 2013, and the main objective of the present 4-year B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education) Programme (240 ECTS¹) is to train teachers for primary and lower secondary schools and to provide a basis for continued professional development.

The programme consists of the following four main elements:

- the teacher’s fundamental competences (60 ECTS points)
- two or three main subjects (majors) (140 ECTS points)
- teaching practice (30 ECTS points)
- the Bachelor of Education project (10 ECTS points)

The teaching practice periods are organised progressively according to three competence objectives and each one of them is divided into the following skills:

- teaching competence
- classroom management
- relations and cooperation

Competences such as classroom management, and relations and cooperation are strongly emphasised during the periods of teaching practice, which is related to what is called the paradigm shift concerning the view of children. During the last 50 years, Denmark has seen a gradual change in the values applied to teacher education and the teacher’s authority, which can be seen in Table 1.

This gradual change has made it necessary for student teachers, in the course of their education to learn how to work with their own personal authority, which makes it imperative to integrate theoretical studies with practical skills in order to be able to master classroom management while teaching. The new teacher education programme has changed its focus from a standard curriculum into output-based areas of competence which according to the new act consists of knowledge and skills; knowing what—knowing how; and knowing why (reflection).

Each main subject (major) is made up of four competences and up to eight corresponding goals for knowledge and skills that are interconnected. The examination must make it possible

¹ ECTS is a standardised European Credit Transfer System created by the European Commission and aimed at higher education. One ECTS point represents 30h of student workload.

to assess the students' competences—a challenge in itself, as the former teacher education programme was curriculum based.

The student's teaching qualifications are based on a three-level taxonomy:

- At the most basic level, the student is expected to be able to *reproduce and identify* relevant knowledge and skills, and to *explain* basic processes.
- At the intermediate level, the student is expected to be able to *establish* connections and to *analyse* known educational situations and challenges through the application of acquired knowledge and skills, and on this basis *act pedagogically*.
- At the advanced level, the student can *reflect on* and *evaluate* new educational situations and challenges that *demand* independent assessment and alternative modes of action in pedagogical practices.

The goal of the programme is thus to educate teachers who are reflective and capable of developing their own practice and, last but not the least, capable of developing new ways of performing their professional work on an everyday basis. The Bachelor Degree Programme for Teacher Education in Denmark must be research and knowledge based, and must reflect the current knowledge requirements of the teaching profession. As mentioned earlier, one of the most apparent knowledge requirements concerns the teacher's relational competence.

1.2 The relational competence project—why this project?

The school is of vital significance to children and young people at a time in their lives when fundamental development and learning are taking place. The quality of the Bachelor Degree Programme for Teacher Education is therefore important in terms of providing the future teachers with general teaching competency, subject-specific knowledge, classroom and learning management, and competences to engage in, create and develop constructive and positive relations with their students. While a large and growing body of research on both classroom management and general and subject-specific teaching competency are available for teachers and teacher educators, the same cannot be said about relational competence. Nordenbo et al. (2008) meta-analysis pointed to apparent knowledge gaps: the quality of the research still leaves a lot to be desired, as only very few RCTs (Randomised Controlled Trials) studies are published in this field (p. 36); the literature primarily reports on studies based in a North American context raising the question of transfer value (pp. 20–30), and, more importantly, there is a lack of common and broadly accepted terminology across the literature on teacher–student relations (p. 71), and there is the need for a more adequate and precise theoretical starting point for studies in this field. It is the goal of the VIA-project on relational competence to address both empirical and theoretical knowledge gaps: the project aims to not only understand more about the nature and characteristics of student and learning supportive relational competences through qualitative studies of student teachers' actual practices and understandings, but also to map the theoretical landscape more thoroughly.

The knowledge gaps in research lead to knowledge gaps for practitioners. Many teachers and student teachers see relations and interaction with the students as the most difficult aspect of teaching, and they experience that their teacher training does not prepare them sufficiently for these aspects of the teaching profession. Local evaluations from the Bachelor Degree Programme at VIA University College and national evaluations confirm this (Danish Evaluation Institute 2011; Graduate surveys from VIA 2009–2011). On top of this, teachers and student teachers require a set of different professional skills; in addition to subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, they must also be able to cope professionally with teaching diverse student populations, develop inclusive pedagogies, resolve conflicts and so on. Hence, there

is a need for student teachers to learn about and to develop relational competence during their teacher education programme in order to be able to create and maintain good-quality teacher–student relations, which provide the basis for a high-quality learning environment in which pupils can learn and thrive.

Pedagogical research and the teacher education programme have previously underestimated the significance of the more person-centred values, such as relations, respect and empathy, in teaching practice probably because these elements are perceived to be natural and obvious elements of professional teaching. They have therefore been understood as and ascribed to aspects of the individual teacher’s personality rather than as competencies to be developed. One consequence of this is that many teachers have been left to work with these factors by themselves; it is as if there might be a taboo involved in dealing with person-related factors in teaching. The area of interpersonal relations and pedagogy is still primarily embedded in the individual teacher’s private experience and values, which places limitations on the quality and scope of the work with relational competences in schools. In other words, the competences are often experienced as personal competences, that is, competences held by the individual teacher, which he or she can use without these competences necessarily having an academic basis.

The project’s goal is to contribute to the development of theoretical knowledge within this academic field, so that these competences can also be understood and taught as formal competences. Furthermore, there is a need to develop knowledge within the teacher education programme and the professional pedagogical area concerning the goals, content and organisation of relational competences in the teacher education studies and in the teaching profession.

1.3 Developing relational competence—the project at VIA University College

Since June 2012, the Bachelor Degree Programme for Teacher Education in Aarhus, VIA University College² has hosted the 4-year long Relational Competence Project, a development and research cooperation between researchers, local schools, the teacher education programme and the NGO *Foreningen Børns Livskundskab* (Children’s Life Skills).

The goal of the project is to investigate how teachers’ specific relational competences can be developed and to gain actual significance for the pupils’ welfare and learning at school. The project aims to answer the following research questions:

- How are relational competences apparent in the teacher’s practice?
- How can focused work with the students’ empathy and attention contribute to the development of prospective teachers’ relational competences?
- Which factors are significant to whether relational competences become an integrated element of the general teaching competency?

The structure of the project takes inspiration from action research (Lewin 1946) which is based on a principle of close cooperation between researchers and practitioners who intervene in and research practices in the field as the basis for the production of new knowledge. Insights are also taken from Scharmer (2008), who also emphasised the importance of cooperation between research and practice in processes that involve change and reform. A unique aspect

² In Denmark, we have seven University Colleges offering Teacher Education Degree Programmes. VIA University College educate 25 % of all teachers in Denmark. We have approximately 3300 students and 200 teacher educators. In total, VIA University has 18,000 students, 2000 employees and a total of 35 different education programmes, such as nurses, pedagogues, social workers, engineers and physiotherapists. VIA is the largest institution for professional Bachelor Programmes in Denmark.

of this project is that knowledge development takes place in close cooperation between theory and practice, making it possible for each participant to construct knowledge from his or her particular position and perspective. The roles of the participants involved in the project are described below:

- The expert psychologists from the NGO *Foreningen Børns Livskundskab* (Children's Life Skills) plan, implement and evaluate teaching in the project.
- The teacher educators from VIA University's Bachelor Degree Programme are involved in the planning and development of the project and are responsible for the ongoing monitoring of the project's success and progress.
- Principals and teachers also play a crucial role in the planning and execution of the project as they have to display relational competences themselves and in cooperation with student teachers and pupils during the practice occurring in their schools.
- Researchers from the Department of Education, Aarhus University, conduct follow-up evaluative research in the project. Researchers from VIA Teaching and Learning, VIA University College undertake research activities related to different perspectives of the project involving eight researchers.

This is a 4-year developmental research project, with the intention to extend the project timespan in order to follow the student teachers not only to the end of their education programme but also into their first year as qualified teachers. It is crucial to the project that the teaching and supervision include teacher educators and student teachers, as well as teachers from the participating schools, in order to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge from different perspectives. Together, they are responsible in establishing the relationships in the practice of teaching.

1.4 Relational competences—what are they? a theoretical approach

It seems paradoxical that our knowledge of teachers' relational competences appears so deficient in view of the many current reviews and meta-analyses that emphasise the importance of relational competences and their significance to the pedagogical process and impact on pupils' learning outcomes in school:

- A review from the Danish Clearing House for Educational Research emphasised the emotional side of the teacher–student relations and the teacher's attention to and positive support of pupils' learning outcomes (Nordenbo et al. 2008).
- Hattie (2012) documented how teachers' ways of communicating the pedagogical content mediated by their personal presence, commitment and relational competence is the most effective factor for enhancing pupils' learning at school.
- In an overview of the most effective inclusion strategies, Mitchell (2008) emphasised relations, personal development and awareness of leadership as key factors in promoting pupils' learning processes in inclusive learning communities.
- In a Danish context, it is documented that pupils' academic, social and personal development are parts of a whole and cannot be considered as separate elements to be nurtured in a school context (Hermansen 2007).

Despite such reviews which offer concrete documentation of the relations between teachers' relational competences and pupils' learning and well-being in school, very few attempts have been made to study the application of this important competence in teaching practice. The project aims therefore to contribute to such research and to offer a more specific understanding of the components of the teacher's relational competences in order to impact the

development of pedagogical practices in schools and specifically, in the Bachelor Degree Programme for Teacher Education.

The project understands relational competence as part of the overall professionalism of a teacher. It concerns not only the teacher's competence to be present in a specific situation and to reflect upon the feelings and the experiences that the relation activates, but also the ability to pay attention to the other's subjectivity and to take responsibility for quality of the relationship. In the project, our working definition of relational competence is

The professional's ability to "see" the individual child on its own terms and attune her behaviour accordingly without giving up leadership, as well as the ability to be authentic in her contact with the child. And as the professional's ability and interest in taking full responsibility for the quality of the relationship. (Juil and Jensen 2002, own translation)

Traditionally, both theory and practice have been dealing with the teacher–student relationship but with a tendency to examine the two components separately and not on the basis of the mutual relationship that creates and maintains the balance of the teacher–student relationship. Working consciously and systematically with the relationship and providing room for development and learning presupposes that the teacher possesses relational and reflective competences and the ability to contribute to the relationship (i.e. to be able to react according to the person) situation and context in question.

Relational competence is *not* what is traditionally understood in psychology as a personality characteristic. More traditional personality theories argue that as humans we have certain fundamental, stable traits that generally characterise our behaviour and are considered to be factors contributing to the individual appearance and behaviour (e.g. H. J. Eysenck's factor analysis and C. G. Jung's archetypes). These analyses have formed the basis for the personality testing and type determination tools used extensively in a business context (e.g. the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator). Traditionally, these characteristics are determined on the basis of such dimensions as introvert–extrovert, stable–volatile, and so on. Yet, there is no connection between personality characteristics and teaching competency (Laursen 2004). Teaching competency, including relational competence, can be developed no matter which fundamental personality traits one may have. Relational competence is the ability to use specific strategies or techniques to achieve student engagement and attention. A number of activities have been developed with the purpose of facilitating concentration and attention (Jensen 2014). Insights are drawn from the growing body of research on the effect of mindfulness and contemplative practices on learning and well-being (Ozawa-de Silva and Dodson-Lavelle 2011; see also the Mind and Life Institute's initiative, Call to Care). It is a key aspect of relational competence to be able to use and benefit from such activities (Nielsen and Kolmos 2013). Yet, this is not the true core of relational competence which consists of being able to meet students and parents with openness and respect, to show empathy and to be able to take responsibility for one's own part of the relationship as an educator. A further account of these elements is elaborated upon below.

Teaching is basically about communicative human interaction. Therefore, relational and emotional factors are significant for the understanding and development of the quality of relations in schools. The quality of relationships are aspects of teaching, not of the teacher, and they are expressed through teacher behaviour along three dimensions: (1) an academic dimension involving the engagement in the subject matter and the teachers' efforts to motivate the pupils; (2) a personal dimension that involves the relationship and communication between teacher and student; and (3) a pedagogical dimension that addresses the teachers' classroom management and scaffolding of the pupils' learning processes (Aagaard 2014).

Recent psychological research has emphasised the significance of relationships and communication for children and young people's learning and development (Bråten 2007; Fonagy et al. 2007; Schibbye 2010; Sommer 2010; Stern 2004). In a school context, this translates into teachers and students creating a mutual, asymmetrical relationship. One person's initiatives and reactions are related to the other's, as both are responsible for co-creating the conditions of their relationship (Schibbye 2010). The pupils' collective conduct characterises the pupil as an individual, and it also says something about the teacher, the other pupils in the class, the learning environment and the school. The same can be said about the teacher's conduct. The same teacher can present herself in different ways in differing contexts and interactions based on different experiences of herself and her own professionalism. The teacher's academic knowledge and personal authority, and also competence to match her actions to individual students or those in a group, have a stabilising impact the teacher's role in the interaction. This means that the teacher is able to assert herself and is true to herself irrespective of the pupils' specific behaviours. When the teacher can keep true to herself and the task at hand and be ready to meet the students—even in situations where the students are not immediately ready to meet the teacher—the teacher is less dependent on students' behaviours, even if they affect her. The teacher who is able to keep true to herself is rooted in her own personal and relational competences rather than in pupils' specific behaviours.

The dependence on the quality of the relationship affects students to a greater degree. Their academic, social and personal competences are directly dependent on the interaction with the teacher and the other students in the classroom. A student who meets an open, attentive and interested teacher with positive expectations for the student will appear to be more competent than one who experiences the opposite. The teacher holds the main responsibility for creating good interactions and a good learning environment and for engaging in relationships that are supportive and nurturing. In principle, this is embedded in the asymmetrical and professional relationship.

We have made the model (see Fig. 1) to illustrate central sub-elements of the concept of relational competence.

1.4.1 Context

Having relational competence entails having a reflective approach to the significance of context to both interaction and learning processes in the school. The context classifies the message, emphasising the importance of being aware, as a teacher, of how differences in position, role, intention, task, to name a few, contribute to defining the framework for interaction and for the interpretation of messages and actions. Therefore, context is placed at the centre of the model.

1.4.2 Appreciation

It is based on a principle of reciprocity between people and fundamental concerns showing respect for the other person's world of experience—meeting another person with an open and genuine interest in that person's perspectives, experience, thoughts and feelings. Schibbye (2010) calls such a relation a “subject-subject-relation”, in contrast to a “subject-object-relation” in which only one part is a player and the other is the person something is done to. Appreciation is thus not another word for praise or recognition but an expression of the adult's understanding of and respect for the child's perspective and experiences—even when they do not match those of the adult. Being appreciative challenges the tendency of adults (and

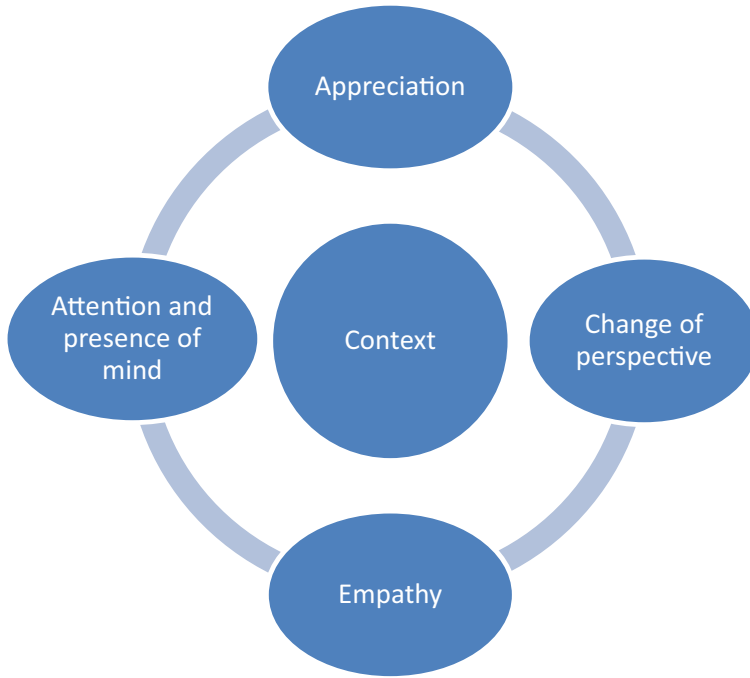


Fig. 1 Sub-elements of relational competence

teachers) to regulate and correct behaviour, and for a while restrains one's own perspective in order to give space for the child. This presupposes the adult being able to distinguish between experience and actions. In a school context, this distinction is of central importance as it opens up an opportunity: on the one hand, to meet the pupil as a person with the right to his or her own experiences; and on the other, as a teacher to disagree with and possibly dissociate from the pupils' action based on experience. Appreciation concerns our fundamental attitude but can be made more specific by relational skills such as listening, understanding, tolerating and confirming in the sense of interconnected skills that are each other's pre-conditions (2010).

1.4.3 Change of perspective

We each have intentions regarding what we do and how we view our lives in specific ways depending on the background and position in which we are placed within our culture and society. Our perspectives are formed continuously, intersecting others' perspectives. This can be called an intersubjective orientation that determines how we can take each other's viewpoints and how we can change our perspectives. In other words, both parties in a relationship must be willing to leave their own perspective for a while in order to view the world from the other party's perspective. In the asymmetrical relation between teacher and student in a school context, it is hardly possible to create this interdependence at all class levels and in every pedagogical situation. Yet, the teacher has additional responsibility for what characterises the relationship and must therefore seek to decode how her own contribution is experienced from the students' perspective and continuously match her actions accordingly. This awareness of perspective on the part of the teacher may help to strengthen an interaction in which the students' experience how their contributions and perspectives also hold validity (Løv 2006).

1.4.4 Empathy

It concerns the ability to identify with, recognise and understand others' feelings, and is fundamentally a relational concept. Our empathy is not freestanding but must be directed at someone and is characterised by a dynamic connection and separation at one and the same time. It may be useful to distinguish between empathy and sympathy, where sympathy entails compassion. When we sympathise with another person, we are emotionally affected and typically feel compelled to offer help; we become involved with our own feelings and find it difficult to separate our own experience from the other person's. Empathy entails separation in the sense that we imagine and empathise with what the other person is experiencing and feeling without taking over the other's feelings. Empathy is directed not only at the other person, but also the other person inside ourselves, that is, we use ourselves as a sounding board in order to empathise with the other person's experience of the world (Fog 2002; Gammelgaard 2002). Empathy is a fundamental precondition for our mental development and creativity, which develops during contacts and relationships. Therefore, children depend on the adults around them to show understanding and take an interest in order for them to develop this competence.

1.4.5 Attention and presence of mind

These are closely related and concern the competence to be present both in relation to the person you are with and in relation to yourself. The good learning and development environment in school depends on the attention of both teachers and pupils. During a busy school day with many tasks and demands, it is mainly the random, impulsive and extroverted attention that is stimulated, so a special effort must be made to train and develop the voluntary and focused attention (Hansen 2002). In order to facilitate presence and focused attention, the teacher can build upon and maintain contact to the natural competences such as awareness, empathy, creativity and basic senses of the body (Jensen 2014). Pupils need help to focus and maintain attention on a given task, and they depend on the teacher's scaffolding participation. By engaging with pupils, taking a specific interest in the pupils' contributions and following up on these by challenging the pupils to explain, amplify, argue, describe and narrate, the teachers involve the pupils directly in their teaching. Dialogue is the basis for guided participation, and via dialogue we gain new perspectives on phenomena and concepts that can contribute to amplifying or changing what we already believe or know.

In the project, we integrate and make use of different exercises that train the student teachers' ability to concentrate, stay focused, be attentive and show presence of mind. The student teachers and pupils of today sometimes find the transition from recess to lessons difficult. For student teachers, it is important to be able to calm down the class and establish focused at the beginning of a lesson. In order to do so with the pupils, they must be able to calm their own thoughts and emotions, and to stay focused themselves. A study of attention training showed that relaxed concentration is the optimal mental state for learning (Terjestam 2011) and research on mindfulness confirmed this (Meiklejohn et al. 2010).

1.5 Relational competences—how can they be studied?

As stated above, the project has a dual objective. One is to investigate how relational competences appear in practice among the student teachers participating in the project, and the other is to examine whether systematic work to develop relational competences among the student teachers has a positive impact on pupils' learning. Therefore, the follow-up research

on the project has a dual focus as well. One focus addresses the student teacher's relational competence, as is manifested in the student teacher's practice, while the other focus addresses the systematic work with relational competence and how this impacts students' welfare and learning.

The first research focus addresses a current knowledge requirement (Nordenbo et al. 2008), namely, a qualitative description of how relational competences is manifested in practice. What happens when a student teacher is to match and adapt his or her behaviour in a given teaching situation that requires interpretation and new orientation? What happens when a student teacher acts in a given teaching situation that not only requires a change of perspectives and empathy but also a change of professional approach? Video recordings of randomly selected students from the project are used to analyse and describe the students' linguistic and physical behaviour in a series of pre-defined situations that can be assumed to require a student teacher being able to interpret pupil behaviour and adapt accordingly. We consider, for example, how a student teacher handles situations with a break in teaching, that is, situations in which the teaching's planned progression and flow are interrupted for various reasons and where the student teacher's ability to interpret and act in the situation comes into play.

The second research focus concerns pupils' learning and well-being and its connection to relational competences. The project investigates whether pupils whose teachers have worked systematically on developing their own and the pupils' relational competences within the project's framework learn and thrive better. The classes in the project typically work systematically with the pupils' ability to focus and concentrate via systematic activities in the class; but can this be said to have an effect on the pupils' skills in these areas in other situations, too? Is it possible to work explicitly with the pupils' ability to put themselves in others' situation and match their behaviour accordingly? Is it possible to work explicitly with the pupils' ability to concentrate and focus in a way that benefits their school work? How can the competence of relation-making and its sub-elements (empathy, presence, taking the child's perspective and appreciation) be studied? How can empathy or appreciation be documented and analysed through data?

One obvious strategy that this project is undertaking is to interview pupils and student teachers about their ideas and experiences, but that strategy can only shed light on *perceptions* of relational competence. This project also aims at understanding more about the *nature* and *characteristics* of relational competences; and therefore, video data play an important role in this project. Borrowing insights from analytic strategies capable of dealing with the tiniest building blocks of teaching and relational work (i.e. verbal and non-verbal communication and the embodiment of teaching strategies), the moment-to-moment unfolding of the pedagogical practices, and also of the relational work can be studied. Empathy, attention and appreciation of pupils and of what they say and do in class are carried out through concrete communicative practices such as turn-taking, voice quality, body language and gaze directions. Detailed attention to what is being said and done and how it is being said and done through analytic strategies from linguistic ethnography (Lefstein and Snell 2014; Rampton et al. 2014), which is informed by strategies from critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis and ethnography, can provide extensive and rich descriptions of the relational competences as they present themselves in classrooms.

The research programme is still in the data collection and analysis phase, so the results have not yet been systematised and finalised. However, the project's innovative character has already opened up future perspectives for the teacher education programme and the teaching profession. The project's analytical focus on situations where classroom management competences and teaching competences must step back to make room for interpersonal com-

petences implies how these skills can be part of the teacher education programme in the future. The project's focus on conceptualising and describing competences of both student teachers and pupils that are not normally captured in evaluations indicates a way to expand the evaluation concept and evaluation practices to also include competences that are normally considered to be unsuitable for this purpose.

2 Experience from the project so far

Our experience from the first year and a half of the project gives us reason to assume that the development and training of attentive presence and empathy actually increase the students' relational competences. Our experience also indicates that focused work on developing attention and relational competences makes it possible to visualise and challenge the person-related pre-conditions that student teachers bring with them into the teacher education programme. Yet, these are learning and developmental processes that take time.

During the first year, both the teaching context of the teacher education programme and the student teachers' teaching of pupils during their teaching practice periods in schools were observed. Data from the observations were supplemented with interviews with selected students. The data material shows that most of the students made active use of attention and presence making exercises as part of their teaching during teaching practice in order to enhance the pupils' concentration. It was found that the student teachers are primarily concerned with what the teacher can do in relation to the pupils. This concerns both concrete methods to calm down pupils and get their attention during teaching as well as how a teacher handles pupils in difficult learning situations. The aspect of relational competence that concerns awareness of the teacher's own contribution to the relation and awareness of the pupil perspective only plays a modest role in the student teachers' descriptions. Instead, their attention is on the concrete teaching tasks such as classroom management and content teaching, which seems to be completely natural. For most aspiring teachers, it is necessary to concentrate first of all on creating a good learning environment and setting a framework for and managing the interaction processes in the concrete teaching situation. Thereafter, considerations and choices regarding content and working methods can be focused on, so that teachers can implement concrete teaching activities. If there is a lack of routine and security, pedagogical tasks are experienced as being very invasive and demanding one's full attention.

The student teachers' feedback collected thus far indicates there are challenges related to learning relational competences during the education programme, such as involving and relating to one's own experiences as an integrated element of personal academic competences, and challenges related to the concrete practice of relational competences during the student teacher's teaching practice (Laursen et al. 2014). Experience from the project at the Bachelor Degree Programme for Teacher Education in Aarhus is still in progress such that no firm conclusions can be derived thus far, only provisional observations and conclusions.

Provisional observations of the student teachers' teaching practice in the second year of the project show signs of changes in pupils' learning processes. Student teachers explain how they have both become more aware of and have actually involved the pupils and their reactions and experiences in their teaching, and they also state a greater awareness of their own reactions and approaches as key factors in teaching. Finally, several student teachers have stated how they make concrete use of knowledge and skills from the project in their encounters with each other and the pupils, and that they experience how relational competences now appear

as part of a personally acquired repertoire that they can use and draw on more flexibly in their meetings with pupils.

The development of relational competence is an area where research is in its infancy and further research is needed to generate findings that can help further develop student teachers' competences to be reflective in the twenty-first century.

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