



## Teacher Educator Story 10



**Read through this story and see what teacher educator dilemma(s) you can spot.**

It's November and my head is in my hands ... what should I do with my final year student group? Fourteen hard-working student teachers, who do, do, do, do, do, do, without learning.

We are a training school and as a school-based teacher educator (SBTE), I have years of experience with final year students, developed in collaboration with the Higher Education Institution (HEI). These student teachers learn and have a small job/salary with us; and do their entire programme in practice: research, peer review, portfolio guidance, and training on diverse research themes. Usually, I have the whole group after their three weeks in the 'learning mode' and the student teachers experience this as liberation: 'Oh, it isn't about the rules and the models that I use, but about focusing on pupil learning and therefore becoming a good teacher? Wow!' I have got used to this reaction. But this group is different! They are task-oriented, linking everything to the standards as quickly as possible, and quickly completing everything. They find the progress interviews a revelation 'What good questions do you ask? Why is this useful?' But everything we do in the group leads to sighing, disinterest, and even rebellion. The student teachers are sometimes dismissive of the expert teachers, who provide workshops, and there are reproaches such as 'this wasn't communicated well'; nobody seems to be open. What now?

This year, for the first time, I don't have control over the trajectory of the programme on my own. I coach/guide/teach the group with three colleagues from my school and the HEI. We thought that would be fine; we are now working with learning outcomes instead of with prescribed formats. Each student teacher has to formulate how he or she will show that they've achieved certain goals. Ideal, right? How is it possible that it doesn't work? The students all seem to want to find something secure to hold on to and no one is really experimenting ... I'm talking to my colleagues. What's happening? What must we do? One of them says 'It will come naturally, they need more time'. But I see that this is going to take too long. I can't go on like this. I find it difficult because we're working together. I would prefer to find out how we're going to solve it. However, I've also seen that, in theory, we're on the same page as colleagues, but not in the implementation. What now? I decide to do an intervention. Just try it!

I'm going to talk to the group of students on my own. I let them tell me extensively about their frustrations. I keep my mouth shut ... oh, how difficult ... because there's so much that I would like to respond with 'yes, but ...'. I only ask questions, ask for clarification, explanation, and reactions from others in the group. The group is relieved. 'We feel that we've really been listened to now'. There are early signs that not everything is bad, there are also good things. They feel a heavy burden and are afraid they won't succeed. I answer 'So you're using this year, which has been specially designed, not to learn as much as possible, because you think you can do that easily afterwards?' A conversation about expectations arises. If you learn all year, I promise you will succeed. That's just what is going to happen. For the first time I have the idea that they will trust me. Step one, I think.

I took another step a week or two later. I have talked about learning, choosing terms that the student teachers can't connect directly to their familiar repertoire. I speak about three-dimensional learning (instead of about cyclic learning), and I contextualize it, including about learning from failures. Something is bubbling. Another week later I ask 'which teacher of Harry Potter is a good teacher and why?' A lively discussion arises. But, I also do something else. I have a consultation with my colleagues. We share our perceptions and we explore what they

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mean. We talk about how we've experienced the first weeks including where it relates to each other's actions. What did we do that meant the student teachers weren't in learning mode? That provided many insights. I'm only now completely honest about what I thought about the start, what I saw and what I did myself. I realize that I should have done this much sooner. We make plans for the next year (to start differently) and we discuss how we'll continue to deal with this group.

In mid-January I notice the result. The group is in a different position with respect to learning. Success! There is a different attitude, there is more adventure, there is more confidence. There is learning. What a relief. I myself have also learned. I'd rather connect with colleagues, take more account of what I see and feel with the student teachers and engage with them earlier.



What's it all about?

### Give the story a title

- Compare the title you chose with that of others in your pair or triplet.
- Discuss the story. What do you think are the key issues that it highlights? You may find different issues from each other.
- Why were you drawn to the issue you identified?
- Do you want to change the story title you chose?
- Look at the key issues you have identified in your group. Are they about the SBTE, the student teachers, the programme...
- Explore one of the issues in more depth. In what ways can we:
  - Prepare student teachers for their school-based experience and manage their expectations?
  - Help student teachers to focus on their professional learning, rather than on ticking boxes?
  - Support colleagues to develop an understanding of how to promote workplace learning?
  - Support colleagues in developing the necessary competences of SBTEs.