AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH TO INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN NORWAY

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is an Action Research approach to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Norway. Starting from the most important question for me as a teacher educator in Religious Education (RE), namely, 'How can I improve my practice?' I create an Action Research investigation over three cycles.

Considering the limited framework of the RE programme in Norway and the lack of sufficient structures for student teachers, in particular RE student teachers, to use for education and stimulus in their professional and personal growth, I argue that the teaching and learning activities in the process of learning and learning to teach have to be carefully chosen and creatively implemented.

Through this Action Research I conclude that the pedagogical tools derived from Personal Construct Psychology and Positive Psychology and implemented in my study serve as appropriate catalysts for improved interactions and relationships between student teachers, mentors and teacher educators.

In the process of becoming and being a teacher, and in my research, these catalysts not only promote reflection about personal performance in the classroom, but they seem to stimulate a valued process of self-assessment, in challenging future teachers to identify their personal strengths and weaknesses.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my grandchildren, hoping that they will meet teachers who are able to see who they are and appreciate what they can do.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction to the research background

This study is the result of a long process of reflection and action with the purpose of coming to terms with the most important question for me as a teacher educator (TE), namely the question of: 'How do I educate a good teacher?' For years I have been dissatisfied with my own practice in the discipline of religious education (RE), a compulsory subject in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Norway. After an experience of more than fourteen years in this work, engaging in this PhD study gives me an opportunity to examine my concerns and investigate more deeply how I can improve my own practice and find a way forward which will imply an increased coherence between my beliefs and values, between what I think and want to do and what I actually do.

I must admit quite openly that I have only limited knowledge of and insight into student teachers' perception of their own situation, their problems and struggle in the process of becoming a competent teacher in general and a competent RE teacher in particular. There could be many explanations for such limits. One is the structure of teacher education, with limited time for interactions between student teachers and teacher educators. Another could be the heavy emphasis on exam results which influences the way in which RE is taught and studied. Even if the framework is limited, I would like to create more democratic actions and more egalitarian power relations in my interactions with my students. I believe that efforts taken to promote these would give me more insight and a deeper understanding of the process of learning and learning to teach, key features of the education and training of teachers.

By means of constructive dialogues based on extended communicative skills and empathy, I want to facilitate and give more space to the expression of student voices in my schemes of teaching and learning. I find that the questions: ‘What do you want to learn?’ and ‘How can I help you to improve your learning and fulfil your potential?’ are two questions worth asking my students (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005). These communicative activities might help me to reflect the voices of student teachers in my own teaching and help me to become a more reflective and critical practitioner (Brookfield, 1995, 1998, 2005, Pollard, 1997, 2002a, 2002b). This process might extend my knowledge and understanding of how learning takes place among the recipients of my work and consequently I would be able to create courses of RE which are better adjusted to personal needs and human conditions (Morin, 2000: 49).

In all RE curricula in Norway, in primary and secondary school and beyond, there is a marked emphasis on personal development (NC, 1997, ITE curriculum of 1998, 2003, NC, 2003). The question then is: Does this development take place as a result of dealing with and reflecting upon essential questions related to religions and world-views or do pedagogy and appropriate methods and tools in teaching and learning activities in RE play a major part in the success of this education for individual learners? An experienced RE theorist such as Robert Jackson calls for more RE research projects which might relate to practice. Being a teacher educator in RE, I share Robert Jackson concern, as I find in relevant literature, a lack of focus on how specific RE topics could be taught and learnt. Jackson argues that research related to RE practice could be carried out in the context of the teaching of RE and outside the field of RE (Jackson, 2004: 15). I would argue that pedagogy and a focus on how RE is taught in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice are important vehicles in this education. RE teachers who teach about love

and compassion have to demonstrate loving and compassionate attitudes in their relationships with learners.

The Norwegian psychologist Lise Brudal has developed emphatic communication (EC), a learning strategy intended for all professionals who work with people. She claims that if one achieves these particular skills, one's attitudes and behaviour towards other people change for the better (Brudal, 2006: 26). She sees empathy as a skill which everybody is born with and one which can be developed through training. In a DVD Brudal explains the procedure of EC and discusses the effect of this communication in the context of the maternity ward of a hospital (Brudal et al., 2004). She warmly recommends EC to be used by other professionals, including teachers in classrooms (see Appendix 1).

As an educator of future RE teachers, I would like to be able to incorporate these skills within my teaching. I also want to investigate how I construct RE lessons where there is a clear coherence between themes and activities, between what is said and how it is promoted in attitudes, body language and communication in the classroom. Jack Whitehead in his research shows how people can position themselves as living contradictions, because they hold values while also experiencing the denial of these values (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 32). Exploring ways of diminishing these contradictions are recurrent challenges in any educational setting, but are probably felt most deeply in RE with its dual objectives of promoting professional and personal development and growth.

1.2 Religious Education in Norway

In ITE in Norway, a new curriculum based on a multi-faith approach to RE replaced two programmes, one with a predominantly Christian perspective and one based on Moral Education

and World Views, in 1998. The content of the new curriculum comprises a number of new issues such as: the study of Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Philosophy, Moral Education and various secular world-views, (Crawford, 2002). A year before this reform in ITE, a multi-faith RE approach was introduced in the Norwegian compulsory educational system, primary and lower secondary schools. As this multi-faith RE subject was a completely new construct both in schools and in teacher education, much effort was put into learning about it and developing appropriate approaches for the teaching of RE in schools, with less emphasis on the discourse and development of pedagogies appropriate for the teaching and training of RE teachers, (Haug, 2004).

1.2.1 Implications for RE in the reform of 2003 in ITE

Every fifth year there is a reform in Initial Teacher Education in Norway. In the national curriculum (NC) of the reform of 2003 it was suggested by policymakers that RE should be deleted from the list of compulsory subjects and offered as an optional subject. After a long public discussion and protests from religious educators and others, the subject was retained as a compulsory subject with Mathematics and Norwegian, but was reduced from 30 credits to 20 credits.

Given this limited framework for the education of RE teachers, teacher education colleges had to compose additional RE courses which might still attract students who were particularly interested in this subject. In Bergen University College (BUC) students can add two RE modules to their compulsory RE module, each consisting of 10 credits.

1.2.2 Implications for RE in schools

The multi-faith approach to RE in Norway implemented in 1997 has a very specific curriculum and contained too many themes that had to be studied in a 10-year compulsory course. Norway

is a secularised society with a high level of membership of the Lutheran state church, combined with a low level of church-going and religious practice (Flornes, 2001, Bates, 2006). As the country is becoming more and more multicultural, there was a need for a change in RE. There is however, a dilemma in the National Curriculum (NC) with its specific values and objectives based on Christianity and Humanism (NC, 1997: 18). Evaluation reports revealed that in many schools the emphasis on Christianity was too strong (Haakedal, 2001).

This situation caused much opposition among minority groups such as Muslims and Humanists towards this education and independently two groups, representing Islam and Humanism, started separate lawsuits against the Norwegian State. After passing through low and high courts in its judicial system with negative results for the claimants, one case was taken to the UN Court of Human Rights in Geneva and the other to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The verdict from Geneva recommended that Norway should change the RE curriculum, making it broader and more open to local and contextual needs and easier for children from minority groups to be exempted from the teaching and learning of specific themes which parents did not want them exposed to (Hagesæther and Sandsmark, 2006). Consequently a new RE curriculum was developed in collaboration with representatives from various faith groups. The final version of this curriculum was implemented in schools in the year 2005/6. The verdict from Strasbourg is still in process as the case was examined by the Court in December 2006.

1.3 My communities of practice

As a practitioner working in an organisation intended to educate RE teachers for primary and lower secondary schools in a country where most children and young people attend state schools, I am a member of several communities of practice. First there is Bergen University College (BUC), the ITE institution with its decision-making body where guidelines and structures of

studies are decided. Then there is the Department of RE, where curricula and RE modules are organised on the basis of the general NC. Thirdly, as a teacher educator, I am responsible for implementing the RE modules with groups of about 25 student teachers who are in their first and second year of a four-year teacher education programme; and fourthly I co-operate with experienced teachers who work as mentors with these students in schools.

As a member of the staff of teacher educators who educate future teachers and want to serve as a role model in my interactions with them, I would like to be creative and innovative in my teaching and learning activities for these students. Because RE and its prescribed teaching and learning approaches, such as narratives and aesthetic methods, are rather new constructs, student teachers who are well trained in this pedagogy could serve as valuable facilitators of the new RE pedagogy in schools. This process would have an impact not only on children but also on experienced teachers and their competencies and skills in RE (Culture for learning, 2003-2004: 13).

1.3.1 Organisation of school-based practice

There are two periods of school practice during a study year when student teachers have to teach all the subjects of the national curriculum. In one of these periods, RE will be the special focus and assignments which connect to critical reflections and pedagogies for the teaching and learning of this subject must be constructed. Members of staff in the department of RE discuss and decide on these assignments and the students produce practice reports based on these tasks which are part of the general assessment of their progress.

In their field-based school practice, student teachers are mentored by experienced teachers who have a variety of competencies and skills. Only a few of them will be specialist RE teachers.

The quality of this mentoring differs from mentor to mentor, as there is no formal training or required qualifications for this work. BUC needs about 350 mentors to work with the 1400 student teachers who qualify for a general degree in teaching. These mentors are given a basic introductory course in mentoring and if they are interested, they may apply for more extended in-service courses offered in the subject which the college also offers.

The variety of qualifications among mentors is a cause of concern for both student teachers and teacher educators. When I observe the teaching of my students in various schools, I notice the variety of mentoring skills these students are exposed to. This implies that ITE is not able to afford equal opportunities for student teachers in their authentic teaching experience in schools. In recent official evaluation documents there is a strong recommendation to strengthen the mentoring aspect of the ITE teaching and learning practice (NOKUT, 2006).
One way of doing this is to build closer relationship among student teachers, mentors and teacher educators and initiate constructive interactions and collaboration.

1.4 Religious Education a vehicle for personal development

One of the major aims of RE in ITE, as stated before, is not only to promote professional development, but also to promote personal development and growth. It could be argued that RE's cognitive, emotional and spiritual aspects could together afford a more holistic approach to education and could 'heap up the process of personal development' (Hull, 1997) for student teachers who are encouraged to reflect upon fundamental values and questions and to connect them to their own experience and personal outlook.

The Danish professor of pedagogy Per Fibæk Laursen has in his research provided evidence for the connection between teachers' personal qualities and the impact of their teaching on learners

(Laursen, 2004: 12). The author also claims that even if we do know about this close connection, both from research and learners' general experiences, we should ask such questions as: 'Which qualities in a teacher are necessary to promote good learning? How do these skills relate to teachers' general competencies and qualifications? How can both professional and personal qualities and skills grow and develop in ITE and in in-service training programmes?' They should not only be explicit, but should act as the focus of observations and research in specific contexts of practice, (Patel, 2003).

Since one of the main aims of my subject is to promote personal development and growth among learners, I feel myself committed to explore these questions more deeply within my own ITE context in order to extend my knowledge, generate new theory and improve my practice. Donald Schön introduces the concept of 'reflection- in- action on action' in his book 'The Reflective Practitioner' (1983) where he sees practice as the authentic arena for reflection. Consequently personal development in the process of becoming a good RE teacher has to a large extent, to take place in practice, which means in the RE classroom where authentic teaching and learning are done, in addition to what any RE teacher or any human being can learn in ordinary real life interactions.

From this argument I draw the conclusion that my research in some way or other has to include this authentic classroom experience. But because the RE classroom of a school is not my framework of practice, I have to seek closer contact and collaboration with experienced teachers who work in these classrooms every day and where my students engage in the process of developing themselves, professionally and personally.

1.4.1 The problem of researching 'Personal Development'

While exam results and practice reports can tell something about future teachers' level of knowledge, reflection, competencies and skills, personal development is not easy to measure and determine. Nevertheless, the personal qualities, values, attitudes and behaviour of a teacher have a major impact not only on the processes of learning, but also on the personal life of learners.

Lipka and Brinhaupt (1999) hold the view that 'the quality of life for a student is directly linked to the quality of life of the teacher.' Accordingly, it can be argued that examples of good practice constructed by a teacher will inspire and motivate good practice among students. From this argument I as a teacher educator have to be committed to educational improvements which start with me as a person and a professional. Then I have to demonstrate in my interactions with my students examples of good practice. When these students go to work with mentors in schools they are then inspired and influenced by these mentors to adopt different teaching styles. The challenge is, however, for both parties; teacher educators and mentors, to motivate these student teachers to become self-organised and develop their own specific talents and potential as teachers.

I share the view of McNiff et al., (2004) that 'education does not mean teaching or instruction, though it can involve these practices', but

> …education refers to interaction between people (and other beings) which enables them to grow in life-affirming ways...
>
> (McNiff et al., 2004: 19)

Drawing upon Dewey (1938), these action researchers claim that the aim of education is to enable mental, physical and spiritual growth and must therefore be understood as embodied in the relationship between people. In this connection I would argue that the subject of religious

education for teacher educators offers an excellent context for a process of learning and growth among future teachers to take place. In this appropriate context or framework, competent teacher educators have to create examples of good practice where important values and beliefs in the subject area of religious education are mirrored and recognised in teacher-student interactions and relations.

In order to be able to do so, individual practitioners have to ask questions such as:

- How do I improve what I am doing?
- How do I help you to learn?
- How do I improve what I am doing for our mutual benefit?

(McNiff et al., 2004: 19).

Actions taken in this process are driven by educational values which need to be explored and defended.

1.5 Teacher authenticity

The Norwegian National Curriculum of 1997 argues that ‘the most important tool teachers have is themselves’ (NC: 38) and claims that: ‘teachers determine by their manners whether pupils’ interest is maintained, whether learners feel competent, and whether learners’ enthusiasm persists’ (NC: 38). To analyse one’s manners in teaching situations is not easy. We might think that our ways of treating people are democratic and respectful while they experience them as oppressive and constraining (Brookfield, 1995: 1).

Consequently teacher education ought to construct ways of working within appropriate frameworks where student teachers are challenged to question their own behaviour and its impact on learners. This key aim calls for specific methods or tools which create autonomy to choose self-determined learning tasks, learning strategies and ways of evaluating results or outcomes (Tiller, 2002).

RE as a compulsory subject for all student teachers offers a good framework for professional and personal development because the subject deals with issues related to ethics and existential questions influencing personal values and beliefs. It would, however, be quite naive to argue that these questions per se, or in themselves bring about good values and ethically inclined behaviour. It requires the extremely important elements of personal experience, critical reflection, pedagogy, creative teaching and learning activities and examples of good practice (Jackson, 2004). The question is then: How do I as a teacher educator inspire or teach my students to highlight and gradually acquire these important skills mentioned above? Hopefully my action research (AR) enquiry will help me to answer this question.

1.5.1 Myself as a practitioner-researcher

In order to be able to explore the central question of 'How do I improve my practice?', I took on the dual role of a practitioner holding an organizational role as a teacher educator in Bergen University College and a temporary researcher for the duration of the research project (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005: xiii, Cochan-Smith, 2005).

According to Coghlan and Brannick, choosing a research topic from one's own organization not only solves a practical problem, but also entails the expectation that the research will make a useful contribution to the organization, to the way in which studies and practices are organised and the knowledge and theories which influence our work. The ideal objective of my study would be not only to improve ITE in my own institution, but also to have an impact which might improve ITE on a national level in my country. As my research is defined as a case study within the paradigm of action research, it is relevant to classify myself as a practitioner action researcher. Whitehead and McNiff define this as a process where a practitioner is

> … engaging in a purposeful investigation, involving gathering data and generating evidence in relation to articulated standards of judgement in order to test an emergent theory…
>
> (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 12-13)

1.6 Personal motivation for the study

Engaging in educational research at one's work place is quite demanding and involves a fair degree of personal commitment. As a role model for student teachers, I should be open to change and transformation on a personal level and use my research to enhance my knowledge and understanding in order to improve both myself and my practice (Loughran and Berry, 2005). As an action researcher I want to engage my students in actions to promote reflection and self-awareness in a process of change and transformation. I believe that teacher education has to be more person-oriented, encouraging student teachers to engage in their own educational and personal development and it should help them to become more courageous, independent and self-organised.

A teacher in any school or teacher education institution cannot help being a role model and has a great deal of power. If we want to spread essential curriculum values such as knowledge, diversity and equity in these contexts, student teachers have to meet these values in ITE, among teacher educators and mentors who can interact with them according to these values. In recent educational reports and guidelines from the Norwegian Ministry of Education all teachers and teacher educators in our country are recommended to promote these values (Culture for learning, 2003-2004). The challenge is, as mentioned above, how this can be done successfully.

1.6.1 The power of coherence between values and behaviour

The psychoanalyst Eric Fromm (1947, 2003) argues that by encouraging people to analyse their own behaviour, they can become conscious of the link between psychology and ethics underpinning all human actions. In this way tremendous energies within a person can be released and used productively. A teacher educator ought to create interactions with student teachers with the purpose of releasing these inner personal energies and encouraging their constructive use. Future teachers educated in this way would probably become more committed to motivating learners to fulfil their potential, than on merely reaching targets imposed by external educational assessors.

If I admit that situations do not change by themselves, but have to be initiated and processed by people, I must start this change and transformation in my own mind and then ask myself: 'What I can do and how I can do it?' (McNiff, 2004: 15).

It is hoped that the process of doing action research and action learning (Tiller, 1999, 2006) affords an appropriate context for this personal development and change. Tiller refers to the International Delores Commission, dealing with essential educational questions for the 21st century, where life long-learning is the key-concept for the future. This concept rests on four important pillars:

1. learning to learn
2. learning to act
3. learning to be
4. learning to live together

(Tiller, 1999: 100-101)

By adding the concept of action learning to action research, Tiller claims that in the context of ITE all actors, teacher educators, mentors and student teachers could co-operate in doing research on different levels with the common objective of improving practice. Following this

argument, schools and classrooms would then be the main arena for thoughtful investigative practice (Whitebread and McNiff, 2006: 17).

Whitehead and McNiff claim to know what can be achieved by AR and have experienced what can happen when practitioners intervene in and improve their own learning, in their attempt to influence other people's learning of ways in which they in turn can improve their own learning and their own situations. Practitioners' accounts of this process create new practices and new theories are created as living theories of practice (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 19). This process involves a new orientation for interactions between teacher educators, mentors and student teachers. It might entail pain and hard work, but according to Tiller (1999: 103), if ITE cannot decide if this direction is desirable, the question to ask is: 'When can we start?' I do realise that as a teacher educator, well positioned in this process, I have the power to try to answer this question. I see my action research study as a starting point and a chance to engage in this feasible and important innovative process, (Tiller, 2006: 107-116).

1.7 Teacher Education and Teacher Training

In the education and training of future teachers there are two different views on the approaches to and the purposes of teaching and learning. These views are conceptualized in the terms 'teacher training' (TT) and 'teacher education' (TE). The first one is rooted in the competency-based approaches to teacher training based on skills and technical manifestations developed in most Western countries in the 1980s. From such a perspective, there is no place for a vision of unique and whole persons who are actively engaged in constructing their own idiosyncratic understandings of what it means to teach, using the totality of personal understandings, through a set of complex and dynamic interactions with others (MacLean, 1999).

For the purpose of embracing a wider and more holistic perspective of this process, the concept of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and teacher education (TE) will consequently be used in this study.

1.7.1 Identifying controversial views on teacher education

According to Korthagen (2004) educational policymakers who emphasize a competency-based approach to teacher education are in contention with researchers who emphasize an approach based on personal development and reflection (Korthagen, 2004: 79). This controversy is also reflected in teacher education in Norway. Garm and Karlsen (2005) analyse the new reform in this education, implemented in 2003, and find two striking trends. First, this reform more narrowly focused teacher education upon measurable skills and professional training, with less emphasis on broader educational issues. Second, the focus on outcomes and external control is becoming more dominant. They found that both schools and teacher education seem to be important elements in the new market economy, governed by the same rationality and external control (Garm and Karlsen, 2005: 742). On the basis on these findings, one might assume that neither professional nor personal development will be promoted in the new curriculum of 2003 unless an awareness and understanding of the importance of a more holistic approach to teacher education are developed and adequate actions taken to promote this development.

Accordingly, this study seeks to explore how this awareness can be raised and fostered by appropriate actions and interventions. To do so, I need an approach to research which encourages me to become critically reflective about my own practice and the practice of my RE department (Brookfield, 1994). I would argue that action research seems to offer an approach relevant to my needs and aims of closing the gap between theory and practice in my particular educational setting.

1.8 Action Research – a powerful way forward

Action research is according to McNiff and Whitehead (2005) ‘a common-sense approach to personal and professional development that enables practitioner everywhere to investigate and evaluate their work’. McNiff (1997) claims that:

> … action research is a powerful method of bridging the gap between theory and practice of education; for here teachers are encouraged to develop their own personal theories of education from their own classroom practice…
>
> (McNiff, 1997: 1)

Change and understanding are key issues in the cyclical process of action research. Admitting that change does not happen by itself, but has to be initiated and processed by people, encourages us to take actions. At this point action researchers differ from traditional researchers, who usually stop at the level of describing a situation and suggest ways in which the situation might be changed. Action researchers change themselves and their situations on an individual level in a learning process which might inspire a process of social change, a collective learning process (McNiff, 2004: 15).

It could be argued that AR is not merely a limited process which might take place during a particular study or investigation, but is a way of living and dealing with both personal and professional challenges (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006). As lifelong learning has become an important issue in educational reforms in Norway (Culture for learning, 2003:13), it is vital to achieve the skills of learning-to-learn. In a discussion about current challenges in the education of teachers, Tiller (1999: 101) argues that this education is a continuous and endless process:

> …There is a growing demand in our society that everybody has to achieve the skills of learning-to-learn. Teachers are key

> persons in promoting these skills. School leaders and teachers have to initiate life-long learning attitudes and skills among learners…
>
> (Tiller, 1999: 101- my translation)

According to Tiller (1999), ITE has so far been unable to respond to the challenges of preparing future teachers with these skills and consequently he asks for a paradigm shift, involving a complete change in styles of thinking and acting. He recommends actors in ITE to start researching their own field by means of action research and action learning. Motivating and inspiring student teachers to investigate their own practice will produce more satisfaction and positive results. As this activity never stops, student teachers who have been exposed to action learning in the process of becoming a teacher will eventually continue this work when they start their teaching career in schools. As teacher education holds a key role for developing good schools where the skills of learning-to-learn are imparted, action research and action learning must be emphasised in this education. With such emphasis student teachers, teacher educators and mentors can engage in authentic teaching and learning activities in school-based practice and make their experience a main focus of research, development and change (Tiller, 1999: 102-103).

1.9 Real World Research

This research can be defined as real world research (Robson, 2002: 3) because it involves people in ‘real life’ situations, teaching and learning interactions in the course modules of RE. The real life is the ITE college and the people involved are student teachers and mentors, who are ordinary classroom teachers responsible for the students’ school practice and teacher educators responsible for designing courses in religious education and implementing these courses within a particularly structured framework.

According to Robson (2002: 6) much inquiry in the real world is essentially some form of evaluation, with a view to making some difference to the lives and situations of those involved through the research and the findings (Robson, 2002: 201). Action research has these characteristics.

As a practitioner, I want to make a difference linked to my own practice, which I want to improve. Actions taken to bring about this change have to be based on a deeper understanding of practice and an improvement of the situation in which this practice takes place (Robson, 2002: 215). This view is supported by Coghlan and Brannick (2005), who look at the question of which people do action research in their own organization and come up with a variety of answers (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). Reasons may differ but there seems to be a typical expectation or contract that selecting a research topic from one's own organization will usefully contribute to the organization's continuous professional development (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005: xiii).

It could be argued that the focus of real world research is the practical problem and the purpose is to solve this problem and then test whether what has been learned changes or will remedy this problem. These procedures are distinctive features of the action research paradigm. Elliot defines this model of research as:

> …The study of a social situation with the view to improving the quality of action within it. It aims to feed practical judgment in concrete situations and the validity of the 'theories' or 'hypotheses' it generates depends not so much on 'scientific' tests of truth as on their usefulness in helping act more intelligently and skilfully…
>
> (Elliott, 1991: 67).

Theories in AR are validated through practice; they are not validated independently and then applied in practice. Elliott argues that the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge (Elliott, 1991: 67).

Having identified my research within the AR design, I must decide on a theory providing a methodology for the actual actions to intervene in the various AR cycles.

1.10 Theoretical perspectives

There are several ways for inquirers to use theory in their studies, both in quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell, 2005: 131). It can be used throughout a particular study as a broad explanation or a more narrow perspective. According to Brookfield (2005) all practice is theoretically informed, making it impossible to separate the one from the other. When we talk about critical theory we implicitly also talk about critical practice (Brookfield, 2005: 352). Critical practice has to consider broad questions concerning fairness and honesty and what it means to treat each other ethically (Brookfield, 2005: 356).

Timmins (1994) argues that the theory of SOL (Self- Organised Learning), developed by Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991) is of particular interest to action researchers and educators wishing to support the development of reflective practice and exploring the process by which individuals think and learn. Within SOL, Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991) have devised a process model called the Learning Conversation (LC) that can be viewed within the framework of Personal Construct Psychology (PCP). This latter branch of psychology is influenced by the theories of George Kelly (1955) whose perspective of the personal is central to his work and implicit in the title of his theory, PCP. Kelly argues that:

> …each person erects a representational model of the world which enables him or her to chart a course of behaviour in relation to others…
>
> (Pope and Denicolo, 2001: 27-28)

The LC format used in the context of teacher education affords an appropriate tool which can promote more coherence and equality in the professional development of student teachers. It promotes personal development because it focuses on the needs of the learners and has the capacity to raise and develop self-awareness. The challenge in this study was to implement SOL as a relevant and integrated part of the RE modules both for student teachers and for mentors. Experience has shown that people need some training in processing LCs successfully. It is suggested that the repeated use of the LC format will, however, promote skills of learning autonomy in such a way that the specifically structured way of thinking and describing one's learning task and learning strategy, which is part of the LC process, and how one evaluate one's learning outcome (a Purpose-Strategy-Outcome, PSO), become integrated into one's ordinary reflections about teaching and learning, (see Appendices 2a-b and 3a-b).

The skills of processing LC were introduced to student teachers and mentors by means of seminars and workshops as part of their study, with the purpose of promoting a more person-oriented conversation between them. I consider the application of good pedagogical tools an efficient procedure for establishing a main focus of attention in the process of teaching and learning. By processing LCs, student teachers, as learners and mentors as learning coaches enter into a structured, organised conversation which has the purpose of promoting autonomy and self-organisation.

1.11 Research Questions

I have so far described my concern about the way in which both professional and personal development among future teachers, particularly among future RE teachers can be promoted. From my own experience and what emerges in official evaluation documents, I have detected the need for a closer and more constructive relationship in the triangle of student teachers, mentors and teacher educators in order to prepare future student teachers for the reality of the classroom.

In addition to my general concern, I have in this chapter identified some relevant broad questions to ask and described my intention to influence a better practice which might afford equal opportunities for student teachers to gain practical experience.

This study seeks an alternative teaching and learning practice which would encourage a group of student teachers actively to determine their personal learning needs and associated tasks, and for these tasks, through the process of the LC to identify their purposes, strategies and outcomes, (PSO), in the context of their school-based practice experience.

Specifically, it aims to address the following research questions:

1. What effects would an alternative teaching and learning practice, based on Self-Organised Learning (SOL) and the process of LCs have on the professional and personal development of a group of student teachers?
    a) Would the student teachers be able to assume greater control over their personal development?
    b) Would the student teachers be able by means of this approach to find their own strengths and weaknesses and thereby find their own authentic voice as teachers?
    c) What are the barriers to mentors and student teachers in implementing this alternative approach in schools?

2. What affect would an alternative approach to the mentoring of a group of student teachers have on their process of becoming teachers in general and RE teachers in particular?
3. What changes would I and my colleagues need to make in our practices as teacher educators in order to promote active participation in this alternative practice among groups of student teachers and mentors?

    a) What changes in the practice of the ITE college and the practice of their practice schools have to be made in implementing this alternative practice?

These questions provide a framework for researching an alternative approach to school based practice for student teachers and for examining the conditions which encourage or impede personal development and growth among them. The findings from the AR activities could provide useful insight into the change processes involved and the potential links between theory and school-based/classroom practice.

1.12 Significance of the research

This study can claim to be important for various reasons. Within university colleges in Norway there is no extended culture of research, even if the teaching and learning activities going on in ITE are supposed to be based on research (Oberg, 1999). Research has proved that teacher education in Norway fails to prepare all teachers for the expectations and responsibilities of new curricula (Tarrou et al., 1999, Hansen and Simonsen, 2001).

Recent evaluation documents from NOKUT, (2006) also point out that ITE fails to prepare future teachers for the realities of the classroom.

Knowledge and skills of doing AR in schools and colleges in Norway ought to be strengthened (Tiller, 2004, 2006). I assume that my AR study can bring benefit to myself as a practitioner and to other colleagues who are concerned about professional learning and development.

I would argue that lack of structures in which teacher educators, mentors and student teachers could work together for the purpose of creating challenging and positive communities of teaching and learning could certainly be identified as one of the main reasons. I also find that ITE needs to recognise the importance of educating the whole person, to afford future teachers with appropriate tools or methods through which they might be empowered to investigate both cognitive and emotional aspects of their personalities and raise critical questions to personal attitudes and behaviour.

The current study can claim to be emancipatory as it gives a voice to student teachers, mentors and teacher educators and offers them a specific tool, the learning conversation based on SOL, which has an agenda of self-development and self-determination (Freire, 1972, 1974). By challenging participants to reflect upon personal strength and weakness, LC promotes a process of self-study and self-insight which I consider to be important knowledge for teachers, particularly for teachers of religions.

Further, the study can claim to be practical and collaborative, since it engages participants as active collaborators in the enquiry (Creswell, 2003: 11). Consequently an action research project applied to a particular case within teacher education is an attempt to generate new knowledge and theories about practice and thereby provide for participants the necessary information to take informed actions. Thus practice can be improved and teachers can be better educated and

subsequently better qualified teachers can be produced. For teacher educators of religious education, it is important to attain new knowledge about the effectiveness of the religious education course and determine whether or to what extent one of the major goals, namely, to 'stimulate students' personal growth and development' is achieved.

The PCP techniques, based on Self-Organised Learning, SOL, demonstrated in LC and the Salmon Line (see Chapters 4 and 6) can reveal the success of specific interventions in the promotion of personal growth and development. Participants of my study, student teachers, mentors and teacher educators were engaged in the assessment by PCP techniques which imply a personal engagement with reflection and the challenges of change. In an educational setting, change is not easy to achieve. Some of the obstacles to change are identified as robotic behaviour, where unthinkingly people do the same things over and over again and personal learning myths, you have clear ideas of what you can learn and what you can not learn deeply embedded in your personality. All these aspects are among the serious obstacles which impede fruitful learning and personal development (Harri-Augstein & Wells, 1994).

According to Korthagen (2001), educational change will not take place if it is not self-directed or self-organised, which implies that it has to be initiated by educators themselves. Other-directed projects, whereby external agents decide to change and develop teachers have proved unsuccessful (Korthagen, 2001: 6). This view is shared by MacIntyre and Hagger, who claim that 'teachers should develop, not that other people should develop teachers' in arguing:

> …The concept of development implies that whatever is added,
> whatever is new, will be integrated with what is there already
> and will indeed grow from what is there…
>
> (MacIntyre and Hagger, 1992: 271)

My challenge as an educational action researcher in the particular context of teacher education is consequently to find out ‘what is there’ and then create ways of developing and growing it.

1.12.1 The contribution of Religious Education in ITE

In this study I also want to investigate the contribution of religious education to the personal development and growth of future teachers. Even if the research takes place within a limited study, it can, if it proves to be successful, have an impact on ITE in my own institution and beyond. Finally the holistic aspect which the study seeks to explore could develop and expand the way that student teachers are educated and trained and consequently contribute to the creation of a new paradigm for this education in general.

1.13 Outline of the thesis

1.13.1 Chapter One

This thesis is presented with the above defined research questions in mind. My reasons for researching how professional and personal development can be promoted in ITE in the context of RE have been discussed in this first chapter. I have identified my research as a case study within the action research paradigm and defined my main research questions (1.11). In this chapter I also identify some key issues related to Initial Teacher Education in Norway and beyond and briefly introduce my theoretical perspectives and ways of carrying out my research.

1.13.2 Chapter Two

As my main interest and concern are the education and training of teachers of religious education, the challenges in this education are presented in Chapter Two, which presents a comprehensive critical review of the literature relating to the education of a good teacher in general and the education of future RE teachers in particular. My experience of and views on a

more holistic approach to this education are discussed in the light of relevant literature, presented under themes.

1.13.3 Chapter Three

In Chapter Three, I acknowledge action research as my mode of study and discuss why I find it relevant and appropriate for my research and why other methodologies are not. What AR is and the particular features which make it suitable for my study are outlined. I also discuss how AR has evolved and why I see this mode of enquiry as particularly useful for practitioners researching their own practice. In addition I discuss why I find Jack Whithead's living theory of practice useful for my research and how this theory relates to my study. I present my AR simplified model, project plans and describe three AR cycles. Finally I discuss issues of validity, reliability and moral authority as these apply to my study. I also present the ethical considerations relating to my enquiry.

1.13.4 Chapter Four

In Chapter Four I present my first LC intervention as the first AR cycle in evaluating my practice and in considering the kind of alternative practice appropriate for the personal development and growth of a group of student teachers. Taking into account the cyclical nature of action research, this chapter traces the various stages of planning, acting, observing, evaluating and reflecting.

This first AR cycle was carried out by means of the implementation of the LC by a group of mentors with student teachers in their school-based practice experience.

1.13.5 Chapter Five

Based on the findings of my first LC intervention, the next step in my first AR cycle is presented in Chapter Five. In this chapter I report the findings from a survey which I planned, composed and conducted in two different ITE colleges, BUC and NLA (Norwegian Learning Academy). The aim of this survey was to explore the views of two cohorts of student teachers who had successfully completed the compulsory RE modules. Admitting that my knowledge about these student teachers' personal experiences and views about this education was rather limited, I had to investigate how it was evaluated among its recipients. I anticipated that the survey could produce the information which I needed to broaden my perspective and inform my reflection about how to design my second AR cycle.

1.13.6 Chapter Six

In this chapter I describe the actions which I planned and carried out in my second AR cycle. These actions emerge from my reflection and findings in my first AR cycle, the first implementation of an alternative approach to practice involving the LC and mentors and mentees. I present and discuss my findings from the documents which I collected and the interviews which I carried out with a group of student teachers.

The aim of this cycle was to investigate how appropriate the use of the LC was in mentor/mentees interactions. As the first LC experiment was carried out with a small group of participants, I needed to implement the LC within a bigger group of participants in order to provide more evidence for my claim of the success of this tool.

1.13.7 Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven constitutes my third AR cycle and focuses on the experience and views of teacher educators in RE and pedagogy. Considering the exploratory character of my study, I found it

necessary to conduct this study as a limited case study involving teacher educators in RE from the two colleges where I carried out the survey, reported in Chapter Five. In this small cohort of four teacher educators, I include two teacher educators in pedagogy who took part in the introductory LC workshop and could consequently give me some valuable feedback on the effectiveness of this tool in the context of ITE. This study was implemented with the third research question in mind (see 1.11).

1.13.8 Chapter Eight

In this final chapter I discuss my own learning process and important themes that have emerged from my study and the problems which I encountered as an action researcher into my own institution. I discuss how the experience of alternative strategies of teaching and learning changed my conceptions and practices of teaching and learning in ITE. Departing from my initial concern about: ‘How can I improve my practice?’ I reflect upon how I can assure that the values I hold and want to promote can be put into action as real-life practices and not as abstract concepts. I also reflect upon the outcomes of my investigation and the implications of my findings for my practice and the practice of ITE. Finally I consider future research into teacher education, particularly the education of future teachers of religious education.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Having discussed the problems I have experienced in my practice in relation to the education of future teachers of religious education, in this chapter I look at issues connected to this topic. I consider the lack of coherence between theory and practice, between what goes on in teacher education and what student teachers experience in school-based practice, to be a serious hindrance to the success of this education.

I explore the double task in my practice; to encourage my students to achieve the skills of learning and learning to teach. As my concern is not only professional development but also personal development and growth, I want to investigate the transformative processes which may prove to stimulate a deeper understanding about what religious skills and competence imply and how these skills and competencies can be attained. As an action researcher in teacher education, my purpose is to construct new and better practices by implementing an alternative approach. Before I can do so, I need to explore and present the basic ideas underlying this alternative approach. Within the cyclical paradigm of action research, this chapter can be classified as a stage of reflection, knowledge acquisition and theory building.

2.2 Change and transformation in teacher education

Korthagen is concerned with what he calls ‘a problematic situation’ in teacher education in today’s world (Korthagen, 2001: 1). He argues that the basic problem may be characterized by a gap between theory and practice and claims that it is very difficult to change this situation:

> …Educational change is a problematic issue. There is not only extensive literature dealing with the often unsuccessful attempts of pre-service teacher educators to influence teacher behaviour, but many studies on in-service teacher education and curriculum development point at the same phenomenon…
>
> (Korthagen, 2001: 5)

Beneath these ‘attempts’ is the underlying assumption that teachers can be changed by other people, that those teacher educators can change teachers. I consider this idea to be very problematic, as I believe that change and transformation are processes which rely on personal initiative and responsibility.

I base this argument on my own practice experience with a number of student teachers in RE. It was only when I started to question the technical-rationality paradigm which I had been introduced to in the early years of my career in teacher education in 1992 and initiated a process of more student-oriented teaching and learning, that my students became more involved in their own learning processes. Together we devised meaningful activities promoting the skills of learning and learning to teach. We also included mentors in schools in this process. The result was that when I came to observe student teachers’ work in their school-based practice, I found that they were able to transform the activities which we had created together into a new context in the classroom. Their ways of behaving and interacting with learners were influenced by the

values and ethical codes which we had discussed and demonstrated in role plays and case studies. This experience convinced me that student teachers and teachers are capable of changing and improving their own practices so long as they have a say and are trusted to do so.

McNiff and Whitehead (2005) claim that teachers are in the best position to make judgements about evaluating and improving their own work. But even if this idea is widely accepted, these authors argue that teachers are still seen as expert practitioners, not as expert knowers, which is a concern because teachers need to have a say in what counts as policy. How can teachers do so? According to McNiff and Whitehead:

> …they need to have confidence in themselves as creators of new theory, so that other people also will have confidence in their capacity…
>
> (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005: 3)

They argue that it is important for practitioners not only to study their own work but also to study themselves by asking questions about what they are doing, why they do it and how they can improve it, as a practical, systematic form of enquiry with an emphasis on what is happening in everyday work. As a teacher educator I consider it among my main preoccupations to be able to initiate this enquiring attitude among future teachers and try to create and develop appropriate methods and tools for them to use in classrooms with learners. By adapting a critical reflective attitude towards practice, these future teachers may be empowered to change and improve their practice.

2.2.1 The importance of critical reflection

According to Brookfield (1995), the habit of critical reflection is crucial for teachers' survival. The reason is that teachers tend to accept the blame for problems which are not of their making. Brookfield argues:

> … We think that all resistance to learning displayed by students is caused by our own insensitivity and unpreparedness. We read a poor evaluation of our teaching (often written by only a small minority of students) and immediately conclude that we're hopeless failures…
>
> (Brookfield, 1995: 2).

The author claims that by adopting a critical reflective stance towards teaching, such traps of demoralization and self-laceration can be avoided.

Reflecting upon Brookfield's view and my own classroom experience bring back memories of situations where I felt inept and incompetent. The particular blame which teachers lay on themselves I know very well, not only from my own experience, but also from numerous professional discussions with colleagues. Initiating this discussion among student teachers might prepare them for classroom realities and provide them with more energy to cope with difficulties and problems. Critical reflection has to cover the whole teaching and learning scenario allowing the teacher to point out what was good and why and transfer the same types of questions to experiences of failure and inadequateness by asking what went wrong and why.

2.3 The challenge of educating the whole person

I believe that teachers who are able to demonstrate coherence in what they say and how they behave in classroom interactions with learners will promote themselves as reliable adults whom children can trust and who serve as good role models for them. In order for them to do so, there is a need to explore philosophical perspectives which might inform particular pedagogies aiming at educating the whole person. Thus a theoretical framework for values and ethics related to teaching and learning can be constructed. I also assume that teachers with knowledge and skills in transformative pedagogies can create constructive and inclusive curricula, responding to the needs of learners from diverse religious or non religious backgrounds. The appropriate pedagogies, if implemented, make it more likely that inclusive communities of learning where learners are encouraged to actively take part will emerge. In this context learners are supported to learn and stimulated with the purposes of developing their full potential as human beings and realizing personally owned possibilities (Webster, 2005). This pedagogical approach could prove to enhance a holistic teaching and learning process and fulfil the purpose of stimulating personal growth and development among RE learners.

2.4 The role of pedagogy in Religious Education

The challenge of creating a programme of RE which could embrace all learners in a pluralist classroom falls on policymakers and educational experts throughout the world. Discussions on this issue among educationalists will relate not only to the content of the subject but also to the question of what pedagogies to create and implement to meet the diverse needs of learners. In secular and pluralist societies, diversity of interests, values and world-views exist not only between people from various cultures and religions, but also between people from the same

ethnic, cultural and religious background. This situation calls for differentiated approaches to teaching and learning.

Accordingly, creative curricula and good frameworks for constructing this education so as to promote good communities of teaching and learning are essential preconditions for the success of this education. The quality of the educational environment in schools is also of importance. The successful implementation of syllabuses for various school subjects depends on teachers who are responsible for creating the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Consequently the quality of teacher competence, skills and values are important agents in the construction of everyday practice in schools.

2.5 The education of the RE teacher

The purpose of teacher education is to create teachers with these necessary qualities who can act as creative leaders of learners' work (NC, 1997: 37). Teacher educators, lecturers in the teacher-training college and mentors in schools, play a vital role in this task and have to be able to engage in a continuous process of change involving personal and professional development, as they will always - consciously or unconsciously - act as role models for future teachers (Fullan, 2001).

Within a state school system where the purpose of RE is to educate learners and not instruct or manipulate them, all activities in this subject have to be inclusive and show a high degree of respect towards the background of all pupils, whether religious or not (NC, 1997: 97). According to Cush and Francis (2002), it is extremely difficult to create an attitude of 'positive pluralism' in religious education. They claim that teaching approaches which at first sight seem open-minded and welcoming to religious diversity may on closer acquaintance appear patronizing and

distorting. Accordingly, the RE approaches created by teacher educators and student teachers must include an awareness of critical reflection on classroom practice.

2.5.1 Appropriate pedagogies in RE

In his book 'Pedagogies of Religious Education' (2000) Michael Grimmitt claims that the wide range of pedagogies developed in this subject has taken it forward from a form of Christian confessionalism to an educational study of religion and religions capable of stimulating pupils' interest in issues of belief and values and encouraging them to relate whatever insight they have gained from great spiritual, religious and cultural traditions of the world to the circumstances of their own lives (Grimmittt, 2000: 5). For teachers of RE, the pedagogical challenge of stimulating this interest among learners who, from various religious and non-religious backgrounds may represent a diversity of outlooks, is tremendous.

While the UK has more than forty years of experience in developing appropriate pedagogies for religious education in a pluralist context, Norway started implementing the multi-faith approach to RE only in 1997. In doing so, it emphasized the importance of pedagogies and well educated teachers who could construct good practice in the classroom. The argument was that only applying the same pedagogical approaches in the teaching and learning of all topics in the curriculum, could establish equality among the various religions and world-views. Thus the needs of all learners in the pluralist classroom were most likely to be met (NC, 1997: 98-100).

2.6 Religious competence

In reviewing the literature about religious education, current interests and discussions seem to be restricted to the subject itself, for example approaches, pedagogies and philosophical, theological and practical issues and debates related to curriculum development (Wright, 2000, Grimmitt,

2000, Breidlid and Nicolaisen, 2002, Jackson, 2004). To a large extent the target subjects in this literature are children and young pupils. Very little seem to have been investigated in the training and education of the religious education teacher, let alone the question of how teacher educators can incorporate the promotion of required skills and attitudes in the curricula which they compose and how they themselves are able to act upon these in their teaching and learning activities with student teachers.

Korthagen argues that:

> …research literature shows a lack of attention for what actually goes on in teacher education and researchers who do write about this still emphasize that the technical-rationality model still represents a very dominant line of thought…
>
> (Korthagen, 2001: 8)

In order to create a realistic teacher education programme in the very limited framework which is the case for ITE in Norway, pedagogies aiming at influencing student teachers, teachers and pupils ought to be discussed and created.

2.6.1 The Gift to the Child Approach

The gift to the child approach is a specific RE pedagogy which was created at the University of Birmingham by John Hull and Michael Grimmitt (Grimmitt et al. 1991). This approach is supposed to demonstrate a transformative influence not only on the child but also on the teacher, indicating that this method promotes religious competence in both learners and teachers (Hull, 2006: 112-129). If this is the case, then one could argue that in a teacher education setting, this particular approach to religious education could prove to have the same transformative effect on teacher educators. It could be assumed that both children and adults are by The Gift to the Child teaching and learning activities empowered to establish a meaningful connection between particular existential issues studied in RE and their own experience and world-views. Thus this

approach to religious education might prove to promote both academic and personal development.

The Birmingham research project was carried out in the mid-1980s. Since then research projects with the purpose of exploring religious education methods which might influence personal development among both learners and teachers do not seem to have been taken any further, as far as I can discover (Sikes and Everington, 2004). The Gift to the Child approach has, however, been implemented in RE programmes in teacher education in Norway, particularly at Oslo University College by Haldis Breidlid and Tove Nicolaisen (Breidlid and Nicolaisen, 2000: 67-69). As this book is on the reading list for RE in several university colleges throughout the country, The Gift to the Child approach has been disseminated among future RE teachers and in schools.

2.7 The competent RE teacher

In order to prepare good teachers for a multi-faith approach to religious education, their particular competence and skills have to be determined. The concept of religious competence was introduced by Heimbrook et al. (2001) and is used as an overall aim of religious education (Heimbrook et al., 2001: 9). This term is based on an understanding that teaching and learning processes concerning religion focus on every aspect of one's development. Thus religious competence means the following key skills:

- being able to deal with one's own religiosity and its various dimensions
- being able to appreciate the religious views of others

These skills include the ability to demonstrate the following qualities:

- active tolerance

- ethically-oriented actions
- readiness for dialogue on religious matters
- constructive ways of dealing with religious pluralism and differences

The presumption of the arguments is that in order to internalize these distinctive skills and competencies one has to start from the view that religion exists in plural ways. One cannot find and shape one's own religious identity without being aware of this religious plurality (Heimbrook et al., 2001: 10). In a multi-faith approach to religious education the existing plurality in the classroom is taken to represent a fruitful benefit which should enrich learning. Interactions between learners in this context should be created in ways which enable people to learn from the views and practices of others.

2.7.1 The tactful RE teacher

How successfully this approach is implemented will to a large extent depend on the ability of teachers to demonstrate adequate religious competencies as listed above, and initiate and construct inclusive communities of learning. In doing so the RE teacher has to be sensitive to learners' feelings and views and face the plurality in the classroom as a real learning opportunity which must be tactfully handled. This tests the teacher's ability to demonstrate tactful interactions with learners. How can a tactful teacher be described? van Manen (2002) claims that tactful teachers:

> ...have developed a caring attentiveness to the unique: the uniqueness of children, the uniqueness of every situation, and the uniqueness of individual lives…
>
> (van Manen, 2002: 8)

In this view, tactful teachers know when to engage with children and their actions and when to keep a distance from them. The question is then whether such skills can be learnt or are connected with personality traits. This issue is discussed by Borich (1999) who claims that:

> … Few personality traits have been found that generalize across classrooms and grades other than those that characterize the teacher as a nice, helpful, socially acceptable individual who is appreciated by most people everywhere…
>
> (Borich, 1995: 92).

Thus is can be concluded that a caring disposition is a key characteristic of a good teacher.

2.7.2 Emotional qualities - a challenge in RE

According to Hargreaves (1998), caring dispositions and intuition are among the emotional qualities of teaching and consequently can be stimulated and promoted in educational programmes. This argument is supported by Laursen (2004), who conducted a longitudinal, qualitative study in Denmark in which he observed and interviewed 30 teachers with the reputation of being very good teachers. He found that these teachers had many different personality traits, but all of them were able to bring three essential values to their teaching, namely the ability to be structured, engaged and empathetic (Laursen, 2004: 125). The author argues that after more than 50 years of intense investigation and research in pedagogy about teaching and teachers, he has come to the conclusion that the personal qualities of the teacher are vital for what students learn. There is, however, no evident connection between teachers' basic personalities and the qualities which they bring to their teaching. Regardless of personal dispositions and personality traits, any teacher can learn to construct teaching and learning activities and relationships based on certain qualities which are important for students' learning.

I would argue that in RE we should promote specific methods for demonstrating the particular skills and qualities, related to structure, engagement and empathy, particularly in the education of teachers of this subject. Issues of religion and cultures may be extremely sensitive matters where a careless, tactless teacher might tread on pupils' feelings and perhaps severely impede their motivation to learn and study. Accordingly, the first step in developing these skills is to create an awareness of the importance of emotional qualities among teacher educators in religious education, which might help them to develop these skills themselves. The next step would be for us - I include myself in this group - to create frameworks of teaching and learning where we could act purposefully in practical situations while interacting with student teachers.

2.8 Purposes in the education of future RE teachers in Norway and beyond

In the context of the Norwegian ITE for religious education, there are three distinctive purposes in the education and training of future teachers:

1. Learning religion: involves accumulating knowledge of the content of the curriculum, including philosophy, world-views and moral and ethical education
2. Learning how to teach: involves skills of general pedagogies, methods, attitudes, values, ethics, etc.
3. Learning how to teach religious education: involves specific skills and abilities for the teaching of religions, world-views, philosophy and ethics

Thus, the required competencies combine subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. The question of linking theory and practice is an immense challenge and most teacher education programmes throughout the world seem to have problems in coming to terms with it (Korthagen, 2001: 1-19). The purpose of the learning process is to stimulate students' professional and

personal growth and development. Thus student teachers must learn to focus on integrating the four foundational skills and abilities, listed above as active tolerance, ethical-oriented actions, readiness for dialogues on religious matters and constructive ways of dealing with religious pluralism and difference. Educators of religious education teachers have to highlight and promote the acquisition of these skills and be able to model and demonstrate them in their interactions with their students. By this demonstration both student teachers and teacher educators are challenged to take an active part in transformative activities which may ultimately change personal perspectives, values, world-views and whole personalities. The problem is that most teacher educators would probably not see this task as a priority in their courses, perhaps because of the structure of these courses, lack of time and an overloaded curriculum, or simply lack of concern and reflection about the importance of this task.

2.8.1 Integration of theory and practice in teacher education

Korthagen and Kessels (1999) claim that there is a tendency in discussions about theory and practice within teacher education to polarize them, asking whether to start with theory or practice, instead of asking the more important question of how to integrate the two in such a way as to lead to integration within the teacher (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999: 4-17). According to these authors, this latter question is fundamental to the effectiveness of teacher education, but seldom discussed in depth in the professional literature, although, as they argue:

> …recent insight into teacher development and the nature of the relationship between teacher cognition and teacher behaviour could offer a sound basis for a paradigmatic change in the pedagogy of teacher education…
>
> (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999: 4)

This argument reveals the need to develop a more holistic approach to teacher education with the purpose of bridging the gap between theory and practice.

The general lack of such an approach is supported by referring to Barone et al., (1996), who claim that many teacher education programmes consist of a collection of discrete courses in which theory is presented without much connection to practice (Barone et al., 1996, cited in Korthagen and Kessels, 1999: 4). Good teaching in religious education would, in contrast, be characterized by the promotion of cognitive, emotional and spiritual qualities and could accordingly claim to be holistic. The question of how teacher educators in this subject could promote this holistic approach has to be explored. A closer look at what is involved in modelling good teaching in general and good teaching in religious education in particular could reveal a deeper understanding of its characteristics and the way in which it can be constructed.

2.9 The RE teacher - a role model

Modelling good teaching is an important characteristic of a good teacher whatever the subject. The only difference one might pinpoint within different subjects is a particular interest in the subject area in which a teacher is educated and trained to teach.

A good RE teacher in the Norwegian context would not only convey the knowledge of the subject, but also demonstrate a deeper insight and understanding of religions, world-views, philosophy and ways of perceiving and acting upon these views in practice. In addition this teacher should convey an awareness of spirituality and promote him/herself as a spiritual intelligent person in interactions with learners (Zohar and Marshall, 2000). There seem to be a connection between personal identity and spirituality. Webster (2005) claims that the individual self is spirit and personal identity is a task or a process and not a predetermined condition defined by others. Drawing upon Kierkegaard the argument runs:

> …The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is the relation which relates to itself or that in the relation which is relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation relating to itself…
> (Kierkegaard, 1989: 43, cited in Webster, 2005: 5).

This philosophical perspective corresponds to the views of Hargreaves and Laursen (see 2.4.2 above) and the autonomous aspect of identity formation found in humanistic and positive psychology (Brudal, 2006).

Personal identity as a teacher has to be developed in a process focusing on inner and outer levels of reflection, core values and core reflections. Britzman (2003) found in a study of student teachers' professional development that they struggle in their attempts to conform their experience to their ideal of a good teacher with the result that they often find themselves in an identity crisis. The reason is that they exclude themselves from this ideal when they find their own personal identity distinct from this ideal one (Britzman, 2003: 25-32). Experiences of core reflection and Self-Organised Learning could help these students to understand that constructing a sound identity as a teacher is a process in which people have to question their values and mission in being a teacher and develop a strategy which enables them to act purposefully in coherence with these personal values and missions. Webster (2005) argues that much of one's sense of personal identity is established through one's values and the reasons for having such values (Webster, 2005: 14).

In the education of teachers of religious education, frameworks where they can reflect on personal values and reasons for proclaiming these values should be constructed and seen as an important part of the curriculum. This reflective process would empower student teachers to

answer for themselves the core questions: who am I, where do I stand and why. Webster (2005) talks about spiritual education as a means to enable children to develop a positive sense of personal identity. He claims that superficial labels of identification should be replaced by a process in which children are encouraged to pursue 'who' by responding to the question 'who am I?' This is made possible by engaging with existential concerns as a way of developing personally significant purposes for their lives (Webster, 2005: 14). This spiritual education requires good teachers who are able to answer these questions for themselves and are therefore able to support this process of identity formation in their pupils. Religious education seems to offer an adequate framework for this process. By focusing on the learner, freedom of choice and self-government in human life and recognition of autonomy as an educational ideal, teachers - particularly teachers of religious education - could prove to be constructive and creative facilitator of the process (Morgan, 1996).

2.10 Examples of holistic approaches to teaching and learning

Claxton (2002) in his influential work: 'Building learning power' (BLP) claims that

the attitudes, values and interests which a teacher involuntarily displays in the course of a lesson constitute arguably the most powerful medium through which the messages of learning reach the students (Claxton, 2002: 93). The author argues that teachers who have understood the theory of BLP have different perception of their task as a teacher from the traditional one. Traditionally it has been the teacher's role to demonstrate mastery of the subject and be able to answer any question which the students may bring up. For a BLP teacher the job is as much to demonstrate the habits and inclinations of the good learner as it is to be knowledgeable and in control (Claxton, 2002: 93).

However, even a very good and qualified teacher cannot be omniscient. In religious education pupils coming from a different religious background from the rest (including the teacher,

whether religious or non-religious) will naturally have more knowledge about the practice of this religion than the rest, even the teacher. Teachers in this context would benefit from acquiring a BLP-attitude as their professionalism would allow them to show students what it is to be a confident 'finder-outer' as well as a 'knower' (Claxton, 2002: 93). Claxton divides his modelling into four aspects:

1. Reacting
2. Learning aloud
3. Demonstrating
4. Sharing

It may be useful to explore here what Claxton means exactly by these concepts.

2.10.1 Reacting

Reacting here means being able to respond adequately when the unexpected happens in the classroom. This skill is among the most difficult to learn, particularly for novice teachers. According to Claxton, BLP teachers ought to be able to model a fair degree of resilience. They need to be able to say 'I don't know' without getting defensive, blustering or hiding behind the tried-and tested formulations of the textbook (Claxton, 2002: 93). In fruitful collaboration there seems to be a specific attitude or quality in leaders which members of project teams seem to value. Ellen Langer at Harvard calls this quality 'confident uncertainty' (Langer, 2000, cited in Claxton, 2002: 94).

Leaders who possess this quality are able simultaneously to inspire confidence that they know where they are going and that problems will be solved, and to acknowledge that they are not completely sure how they are going to get there, but they will value support and collaboration in figuring out how to do it (Claxton, 2002: 94). Claxton argues that teachers can develop the same

kind of quality. Students seem to welcome the opportunity to see and respect their teachers as learners as well as founts of knowledge. This quality promotes coherence in teaching and learning and the fact that teachers practise what they preach when it comes to learning seems to stimulate their students to take on some of the responsibility for planning their work together with the teacher. In this way self-organised learning is promoted. It could be argued that this experience promotes autonomy and encourage learners to trust their own judgment and competence. I consider this experience to be essential in the process of learning to teach because it implies the potential for novice teachers to construct their professional identity as teachers.

2.10.2 Learning aloud

This concept refers to teachers' ability to model to their students the kind of thoughts (and emotional processes) that learners go through, usually covertly. Claxton claims that this activity is very important because many of the skills of learning only manifest themselves in the inner world of the learner. This has to do with ways of internally dealing with the choices, challenges and frustrations which crop up in the course of learning. Opportunities for learning aloud present themselves in the context of reacting to unexpected events as they occur. But they can also be deliberately created by being willing to undertake activities in the classroom to which teachers have neither figured out an answer - nor an entirely reliable learning route to an answer - in advance (Claxton, 2002: 94). The author argues that it is possible to start this process in small ways and gradually build up more challenging situations remembering that it takes time and experience to acquire these skills. He claims that both pre-service and in-service forms of professional development of teachers should contain plenty of sessions where they get used to reflecting on their own learning methods (both within their particular subject and more broadly) and practising the kind of learning aloud which they will be doing with their own students.

2.10.3 Demonstrating

In conventional schooling there is no opportunity to demonstrate to learners what a slow and uncertain process learning often is. In order to understand this so as to reach the purpose and intended outcome of learning, there are many trials and errors. The knowledge which students are presented with in text books is the result of much hard work and effort. Claxton gives several examples to show how this can be demonstrated in various subjects.

In religious education, knowledge is not only to be found in textbooks, learners and teachers will have a great deal of knowledge transmitted from their particular traditions and personal experience. Accordingly, teachers and pupils could work together to develop the skills of interfaith dialogue, where issues to discuss are decided upon in plenary sessions and all the learners bring in perspectives from their personal knowledge, experience and practice. In this context critical questions will arise. According to Shepherd (2003) it is the aim of religious education to equip learners to handle these questions and create supporting environments where learning can take place (Shepherd, 2001: 319).

2.10.4 Sharing

The last concept in modelling is sharing, which indicates the possibility for teachers to share their own learning history with learners, both the formal history and the out-of-school learning experiences. Claxton gives a number of examples to show how this can be done (Claxton, 2002: 99). This allows teachers to show that they can laugh at their own ignorance. They can also talk about others who have been models of persistence and ingenuity for them and the impact these people have had on their lives. According to Claxton once teachers start thinking about learning as a continual real-life thing and not simply something that requires books and teachers and grades, they find that there is no shortage of things they might talk about. Every learner

remembers precious moments at school when teachers shared stories from their own personal lives and teachers know that pupils are very attentive to those stories.

I believe that it would be most relevant and effective to promote an attitude of BLP in ITE, as Claxton suggests. It is evident that by modelling learning, the focus is on the learning process and how this can be constructed and processed, which is a core interest for all actors in this context, teacher educators, mentors and student teachers. By this method we could construct inclusive and creative frameworks for the process of learning to teach.

2.11 Building learning power in Teacher Education

The difference within teacher education between a BLP approach and a traditional approach, identified by Korthagen as the technical-rationality model (Korthagen, 2001: 3), would be that in the latter knowledge about teaching is considered as an already created subject and not as a subject to be created by the learner or the student teacher (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999: 7). With a more constructivist approach like the BLP approach to learning and the process of learning to teach, emphasis shifts towards inquiry-oriented activities, interaction among learners and the development of reflective skills. Promoting these skills among future teachers of religious education could prove to prepare them more constructively than traditional skills do for the challenge of multiculturalism and diversity in the classroom, not only in RE lessons but in any lesson and interaction with pupils. A good RE teacher education has to prepare future teachers for the reality of religious and cultural diversity in schools and provide a scaffolding of experience to promote equity in classrooms whatever the national or local situations.

2.11.1 Challenges of religious and cultural diversity

The awareness of the importance of diversity as a central part not only of religions, but also of cultures must be increased and given its due weight in religious competence. The fact that these areas are not only embedded in traditions and specific cultural heritage, but also dynamic and therefore subjected to continuous development and change, has to be thoroughly understood. Thus a religious education teacher has to clarify and be able to interpret how students, parents and various religious or non-religious communities address various religious or non-religious perspectives and world-views. This competence is crucial, because behaviour, attitudes and values are based on religious and cultural identity. A Muslim child, who does not want to draw human beings or any living being because his Islamic background traditionally forbids it, has to be understood and given exemption from such an activity. Thus a continuous updating of how a particular religion and systems of belief are interpreted and practised in a cultural context has to be given its due place in whole-school developmental plans.

When the new construct of religious education was introduced in Norwegian state schools in 1997, some teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about other religions than Christianity. The result was that pupils from ethnic minorities did not recognise their religion and religious practice as it was presented and understood in the religious education lessons (Hagesæther et al., 2000). This caused criticism and doubts about the validity of the new RE construct. In-service training courses for teachers, with the revision of textbooks to meet the approval of practitioners of the religions in question, have improved this situation.

This experience shows that interactions with pupils from cultural and religious minority backgrounds have to be true interactions welcoming the active participation and sharing of experience. True interactions are based on accurate factual knowledge and the demonstration of

religious competence in a wide sense. Updating of facts and insight into the practices of a particular religion and how systems of belief influence the daily lives of adherents have to be part of the ongoing professional development of teachers of religious education.

The fact that people from multiple cultures and religions come together in the same classroom challenges the RE teacher to devise adequate interactional ways of working where openness and close relationship are valued. Trust, mutual respect and understanding are essential prerequisites for the creation of true interactions. Given that ways to learn these qualities can be taught in education and training, they should be acquired through revised structures and approaches in the curricula for teacher education.

2.12 Active participation in personal development

According to Wardekker and Miedema (2001) a transformative model of learning rests on a view of how human beings act in the world. If the definition of learning is the participation and transformation of all domains of human ability and potentiality, the development of the whole person should be taken into account (Wardekker and Miedema, 2001). These authors emphasize that transformation is an active process on the part of the learner and claim that the process is necessary for the formation and development of personal identity. Meanings and formation of images occur as we live in the world and transact with it. The individual thus takes part in a continuous interplay between action, signification and reflection. The assumption is:

> ...meanings are never objective but are always the result of the instantaneous and creative relation between the human being and its environment…
>
> (Wardekker and Miedema, 2001: 27)

From this perspective it can be argued that a good learning environment should afford the most meaningful experience possible for the learner. In this process knowledge plays a vital part but is not sought exclusively for its own sake. It also has a function for the other domains of experience (Wardekker and Miedema, 2001: 28). This view seems to correspond with a holistic, learner-based approach to learning and the creation of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to use the Vygotskian concept, for the motivation and encouragement of the learning process, (Daniels, 1996, 2001, Miller, 2003). Wardekker and Miedema derive their perception of knowledge from Dewey who claims that 'knowledge is a mode of experiencing things which facilitates control of objects for purposes of non-cognitive experience' (Dewey, 1938, cited in Wardekker and Miedema, 2001: 28).

Knowledge is seen as only one aspect or mode of experiencing and does not exist on its own. Personal development is not the same as amassing knowledge; it occurs when experiences, including their knowledge aspect, are re-interpreted into a way of life. Because humans are born into a culture, a world that already has a meaning, humans can not signify this culture at will. The environmental conditions and adults' abilities and understanding of ways to afford adequate attunement for a child's growth and well-being will have a major impact on this process. As cultural meanings are acquired by active participation in social-cultural practices, practical interactions with the world have to be established. As they grow up children engage in practices by groups of people in communities of practice. In this socialization process individual abilities based on personal characteristics will play a significant role in transforming these cultural meanings in individual personalities. The adaptive process varies from person to person and creates different personalities and the interpersonal differences make for changes in intercultural

practices (Wardekker and Miedema, 2001: 29). The task of education is accordingly to assist young people in the double process of socialization and individualization.

The teacher of religious education has to perceive this double process from the perspective of their specialism. In a pluralistic society multiple cultural, religious and world-views will exist within the same classroom challenging the ability of teachers to engage adequately in the double process of socialization and individualization for every learner. Because these learners have different needs, teachers have to acquire the necessary skill to attune to these needs from a flexible perspective. The purpose of this task is to make children and young people competent members of communities of practice (Wardekker and Miedema, 2001: 29). It may be summed up as the adaptive process of bridging the gap between the past and the future in a dynamic and changing transformation. Lines (1992) describes this adaptive process as:

> …the existential learning-adaptive process of transforming the heritage of the past into an actualised vision of the ideal future…
> (Lines, 1992: 47)

In this process meaning and cultural identity are established. Competent and creative RE teachers are able to create a learning environment for initiating this transformative process.

2.13 Contribution of Religious Education to transformative education

The purpose of transformative education is to educate the whole person and thereby play a vital part in people's personal development in the double process of socialization and

individualization. It can be seen as a way of creating the best possible framework in which people are stimulated to develop their full human potential. Some of the many myths about learning which serve as obstacles and hindrance for fruitful learning have been identified by Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991). These negative myths must be replaced by positive myths conveying theories about the personal ability to learn through purposeful learning strategies developed within a framework of self-direction along with encouraging and supportive scaffolding (Brudal, 2006).

The feeling of mastery and participation in one's construction of a learning process are significant characteristics of optimal experience. Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi (1992, 2002) introduced the concept of flow, the state of such involvement in an activity that nothing else seems to matter (Csikzentmihalyi, 2002: 4). The interpretation of flow is a continuous movement, a dynamic process which does not seem to stop. Flow is perceived as enjoyable moments which one wants to prolong. There seems to be a widespread interest today in the study of flow within a number of research areas. It can be applied to educational research to understand constructive learning and as a theory of illuminating religious experience (Csikzentmihalyi, 2002: 5).

2.13.1 Flow from a Norwegian perspective

The Norwegian professor of pedagogy, Erling Lars Dale, talks about flow as a holistic and harmonious experience, in which the learner opens up to new insight and understanding. A moment of intellectual and emotional perception occurs when deep learning takes place (Dale, 2001: 288). If appropriate pedagogies are introduced in RE, there are reasons to believe that a subject comprising cognitive, emotional and spiritual experience might promote deep learning. Thus RE could contribute constructively to holistic and transformative education.

2.14 RE as a holistic experience

This argument is supported by Wardekker and Miedema (2001) in their claim that religious education can open up an understanding of what religious experience as a whole implies, through narratives, art, rites, doctrines, prayers, psalms and religious practices. This religious experience is concerned with what is not incorporated in human practices, and can not be understand in terms of such practices; therefore it cannot be known directly but can only be talked about in the form of narratives, symbols and rituals (Wardekker and Miedma, 2001: 30).

It cannot be denied that the issues being dealt with in RE are sometimes hard to understand, for they in various ways try to transmit and give insight into transcendence and its influence on individual behaviour. Religious experience, however, is not isolated from other daily experiences, it is potentially a dimension of every experience, a dimension which deepens other experiences and makes people perceive the world differently and behave accordingly (Armstrong, 2004).

2.14.1 Religious experience - an agent of change

Wardekker and Miedema (2001) derive their arguments from Dewey and James, claiming that the difference between a normal experience and a religious experience lies in the fact that the first one is fragmented due to extraneous interruptions or inner lethargy, while the latter is characterized by consummatory closure (Wardekker and Miedema, 2001: 30). According to these authors, the actual religious quality in the experience covers the better, deeper, and enduring adjustment in life and its conditions, creating significant moments of living. The way in which the experience functions determines its religious value. If the reorganization actually occurs, it is a force on its own account (cf. Dewey LW9, 11, quoted in Wardekker and Miedema,

2001: 30). In this connection the term ‘adjustment ‘is crucial and implies the third and highest level of transformation. The three steps in this process are as follows:

1. Accumulation = mainly passive modification of personal attitudes
2. Adaptation = the process in which we modify the environment to accommodate it to our wants and demands
3. Adjustment = a reorganization of our being in its entirety, our personal reconstitution of our fundamental striving which changes us permanently

This permanent change is initiated and experienced on a personal level and is not necessarily connected to institutionalized religion, though it can occur in such a context. However, institutionalized religion can also hinder true religious experience because it does not allow fruitful renewal by means of distantiation (Wardekker and Miedema, 2001: 31).

2.14.2 Religious experience in the context of state schools

In the context of the state schools, attended by most children and young people in Norway, there is no truth claim or attempt to persuade as key purposes of religious education. Its main purpose is to promote knowledge and understanding of the significance of religious experiences on both individual and institutionalized levels. Hence there are no impediments to the critical questioning of religious beliefs and practices if this is done in a tactful and respectful manner. It cannot be denied, however, that the question of truth plays an important role among religious believers and non-believers and consequently in the two perceptions of viable approaches to religious education, confessional and non-confessional. Shepherd (2003) argues that these two perspectives, both individually and jointly, promote the pursuit of truth, wherever it is to be found (Shepherd, 2003: 322).

In a context where all children are taught together, various truth claims can be studied and critically questioned, leaving all learners free to find their own answers. According to Wardekker and Miedema (2002: 31), religion functions for many people as a way of making their peace with the world. Thus religion can both show a way to a more joyous way of living and alert us to what is missing and wrong in our lives and practices.

2.14.3 How can religious practice be studied and experienced?

Educators in religious education witness the high interest among student teachers in visiting religious centres and inviting representatives from various faith communities into the classroom. In these interactions they always ask their guests many questions about personal religious life and essential meanings of living. This experience shows that it is valuable to encounter lived religions in a religious education programme and activities for this particular experience should be integrated in the curriculum (Teece, 1993a, 1993b).

Even if the curriculum does not recommend religious worship in schools, schools are recommended to organize real services or other religious rituals in connection with religious festivals. Participation is based on individual religious adherence and is not compulsory. Thus it is possible to experience authentic religious practice within the RE programme.

2.15 Promoting the skills of emotional literacy in ITE

Specific strategies should be developed when a holistic curriculum in teacher education is being composed; these should concentrate on improving student teachers' capacity to understand and care for others, themselves and to find ways of controlling their own emotions. According to Denzin (1984), emotional understanding is defined as:

> …an intersubjective process requiring that one person enters into the field of experience of another and experiences for herself the same or similar experiences experienced by another…
>
> (Denzin, 1984: 132)

Hargreaves (1998) draws upon sociological and social-psychological literature in his analysis of the location and representation of emotions in teachers' relationship with their students. He identifies the following four points:

- Teaching is an emotional process.
- Teaching and learning involves emotional understanding.
- Teaching is a form of emotional labour.
- Teachers' emotions are inseparable from their moral purposes and their ability to achieve those purposes.

As the third point, emotional labour, has not been introduced before, it needs some clarifications. Hargreaves claims that for many teachers this is a positive endeavour for it can be interpreted as a labour of love and therefore a very important aspect of teaching. It is a way of putting care into context. If we accept that teaching is an emotional process, than promoting emotional understanding should also take place. Referring to Denzin (1984), Hargreaves (1998) argues that lack of emotional understanding causes what Denzin calls 'spurious emotionality' (Denzin, 1984, cited in Hargreaves, 1999: 839). Teaching is full of spurious emotion and responsible for its many misunderstandings. Hargreaves gives some reasons for this. Because of the power dynamics of the classroom, many teachers' emotional experiences on the one side of the desk are separated from students' experiences on the other. Then there are so many students that close relationships with most of them are impossible. In addition the author refers to the assessment processes, which provide little scope for student self-assessment and therefore little opportunity

for teachers to discover how students feel they are responding to their learning. In addition, curriculum frameworks are filled up with content, standards, benchmarks and coverage to such an extent that there is little room for care, making cognitive and emotional misunderstanding chronic features of many schools and classrooms. The author goes on to argue that teachers frequently misconstrue their students' exuberance for hostility, bored compliance for studious commitment, embarrassment for stubbornness and silent respect for sullen resistance.

2.15.1 Consequences of the lack of emotional understanding

Misunderstandings caused by a lack of emotional competence seriously interfere with teachers' ability to help their students learn. When teachers come from a different ethno-cultural or social class background from their students, when they are teaching 'other people's children', these gaps of emotional misunderstanding become greater still (Hargreaves 1998). The problem of labelling a minority group as 'others' is a well-known phenomenon in multi-cultural societies. In the religious education curriculum in Norway, the study of religions differing from Christianity used to be called the study of 'other religions' (NC, 1997). This discriminative labelling promoted a gap of emotional understanding which Hargreaves condemns. Even though this description is confined to situations in schools, we have every reason to believe that the same phenomena of emotional misunderstanding also take place in higher education.

2.15.2 Promoting emotional literacy in ITE

The promotion of emotional literacy within a teacher education programme has to serve two purposes, namely the learning and the process of learning to teach. Future teachers have to understand their own emotions and the emotions of children and young people whom they will meet in their classrooms. Courses of emotional literacy should be offered as a particular course or as an integrated part of a particular subject. Religious education could prove to provide a

suitable framework for the promotion of these skills. If we accept the contention of Hargreaves that spurious emotionality is a significant social and educational phenomenon which tends to increase in a multicultural setting, then the education of future RE teachers has to incorporate emotional understanding. The question is first how to do it, and then what are the best possible approaches for implementing this education.

2.16 Modelling emotional skills in the education of teachers

Kassem (2002) claims that teacher educators should model social/emotional skills in their teaching and learning activities with their students. In displaying and encouraging honesty, openness and acceptance, they demonstrate the necessary abilities to build trust and establish meaningful personal connections with others (Kassem, 2002: 369). The author argues that:

> …Teacher educators who work to build trust and forge meaningful relationships with each student in their classroom, despite class size and lack of time, probably do more to facilitate the same behaviour in pre-service teachers than any other exercises could…
>
> (Kassem, 2002: 369)

According to my experience as a teacher educator for more than a decade, trust and meaningful relationships create positive learning environments. The obstacles are mentioned both by Hargreaves, referring to general education in schools and by Kassem referring to teacher education; class size and the lack of time represent serious obstacles to the establishing of these qualities, as do lack of awareness of the influential power of trust and meaningful relationships among teachers and teacher educators in general.

Hargreaves (2002) conducted a study of the emotions of teachers which included data on teachers' recollections of emotionally positive and negative interactions with their colleagues. He found that teachers made almost no explicit reference to trust as a source of positive emotion among their colleagues. However, teachers did report negative emotions with their colleagues, including the opposite of trust-betrayal. He argues that if schools are going to become stronger professional learning communities, they must seek not only to establish trust in teaching, but also to avoid causes of pervasive betrayal.

DiPardo and Potter (2003) claim that it has been widely recognised that students need both caring sensitivity and intellectual challenge. They claim that school reformers, theorists and researchers alike have been slower to recognise that the same can be said of teachers' work and on-the-job learning. The relations between optimal learning conditions for students and similarly supportive working conditions for their teachers seem to be underestimated (DiPardo and Potter, 2003: 317-318). Cohen (2001) suggests that teacher education programmes need to address the following issues:

- The role of emotion in learning and teaching
- Personal decoding skills
- Ways of using decoded emotions to solve real-life, social-emotional problems

Kassem (2002) elaborates these issues by suggesting practical ways of developing emotional literacy in teacher education. The first step could be to examine the word 'emotion', which stems from the Latin root 'movere' meaning to move. Accordingly, emotions move people to respond. Emotions are communicated in two ways, verbally and non-verbally and Kassem claims that there is a lack of practice with non-verbal messages (Kassem, 2002: 366). Accordingly, teacher educators ought to pay attention to this issue by asking student teachers such questions as:

- What body language precedes an emotional outburst in the classroom?
- What facial expressions reveal surprise (which includes raised eyebrows in many cultures) or anger (which can be culture-specific)?

Kassem recommends the use of role-playing as a good vehicle for the study of both verbal and non-verbal emotional messages. The author goes on to define a number of research findings which teacher educators ought to discuss with student teachers (Kassem, 2002: 366-367). Six innate emotions have been identified as primary and universal in cultures around the world: fear, anger, sadness, surprise, disgust and enjoyment (Goleman 1995). Research confirms that emotion and attention are the main processes used by the brain to survive and to determine what is important. They are both critical for learning. Stronger emotions lead to stronger memories (Sylvester, 1995, cited in Kassem, 2002: 366-367). Further, neurotransmitters are brain chemicals which communicate emotion and change behaviour. The climate of the classroom can change the brain's chemistry so as to impede learning and memory, but a positive classroom climate can elevate neurotransmitters which enhance learning and memory (Kassem, 2002: 366-367). Kassem also refers to the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (1990) who describes a state of peak performance occurring in creative or other endeavours called flow, (see p. 53 above,) a zone in which excellence becomes effortless. In a discourse about this flow Goleman (1995) argues that 'flow represents perhaps the ultimate in harnessing the emotions in the service of the performance of learning' (Goleman, 1995: 90). This argument strongly supports the value of promoting emotional literacy in teacher education, as performance is the umbrella which every teacher must carry and use constructively.

2.16.1 Decoding emotional expressions

The next step in promoting emotional literacy is to increase the ability to decode or read one's own emotions and those of others. This involves emotional self-awareness, the ability to monitor,

identify and understand one's own emotions in context. Kassem claims that teacher educators can help students to identify their own emotions and their possible causes/contexts by encouraging introspection. There are various ways of doing this; using student journals to record insights and 'self-talk' regarding emotions are both strategies for encouraging introspection. Another way is to prompt students to determine how their emotions affect their ability to achieve goals. Positive emotions typically facilitate goal achievement, while negative emotions can impede it. Once students become aware of the emotions underlying their actions (or lack thereof), they become better able to work towards goals. Increased emotional self-awareness can contribute to the development of a stronger self-concept. Emotional decoding skills also involve empathy, the ability to read and feel the social/emotional signal of others.

2.16.2 Emotions in the teacher-student relationship

In a teacher-student relationship emotional ability helps to establish a trusting relationship in which both parties can develop and grow. A precondition for these trusting relationships is the possibility of establishing close and long-lasting relationships. If this is not the case, emotional misunderstanding may arise from people's mistaking their feelings for the feelings of the other (Denzin, 1984: 134). Hargreaves (2001) claims that successful teaching depends on working conditions which make emotional understanding possible, together with close bonds with key people, colleagues as well as students (Hargreaves, 2001: 508). He introduces the term 'emotional geographies', consisting of 'the spatial and experiential patterns of closeness and/or distance in human interactions and relationships that create, configure and colour the feelings and emotions we experience about ourselves, our world and each other'.

In colleges of teacher education, teacher educators have to relate to many students in a short time, making it difficult to establish close relationships with individual student teachers. In this context, attitudes and behaviour which demonstrate emotional literacy are very important. Hargreaves (2001) underlines the fact that the emotional understanding and misunderstanding occur not only in consequence of personal emotional competences or its absence, but also because of the ways in which organizations promote or inhibit the shared experiences and close, sustained interactions which foster common understanding. Thus, acquiring emotional literacy depends on how successfully it is promoted as an educational institutional system in the whole community of learning and the quality of the human relationships established and developed on the individual level. Educators of religious education in general should initiate and take actively part in this process. A closer look at how trusting relationship can be built may be helpful at this point.

2.17 The Challenge of building trusting relationships

Nel Noddings introduced the notion of care in connection to education. In her book 'The Challenge to Care in Schools' (1992) she claims that interpersonal skills are hard to develop. Consequently there is a need for both a theory of care and an ethic of caring. In this ethic there are four major components:

- Modelling
- Dialogue
- Practice
- Confirmation/Affirmation

In teacher-student interactions, teachers have to show that they care about their students by actively responding to students' needs. Noddings argues that by genuine dialogues, of which neither party knows at first what the outcome or decision will be, are important tools to

encourage in caring relationships (Noddings, 1992: 23). By practice, characteristic attitudes of caring are shaped and internalised into individuals' personalities. Appropriate frameworks for this kind of experience have to be created as natural components of curricula. Student teachers who have experienced these kinds of caring experiences in ITE are probably more prepared to initiate the same experiences in schools.

In this moral education scheme the fourth component is affirmation. This is a concept taken from the philosophy of Martin Buber (1985) who defines affirmation as an act of confirming and encouraging the best in others. This is a way of spotting a better self and encouraging its development (Buber, 1985: 25). A closer look at Buber's important contribution in the area of pedagogy may throw more light on these ideas.

2.17.1 Theoretical perspectives on relationship

In a collection of articles about pedagogies called The Many Faces of Pedagogies, the Swedish scholar Göran Björk writes about Martin Buber (Steinsholdt and Løvlie 2004: 435-352). Björk calls his article 'With Life in the Centre', as he claims that Buber promotes a holistic approach to his thinking, with the focus on life and activities, superior to knowledge and performance. The influence of Martin Buber's philosophy on pedagogy is connected to the understanding of dialogue as relationship and presence. He developed a perception of every human being as a person, as opposed to the concept of an individual. A person is unique and independent with an autonomous responsibility to act in the world, whereas an individual is part of a group, a collectivism which has a structure for individuals to play their roles in.

There seems to be a connection between Buber's perception of man as person and the view held by Kelly and Rogers within humanist psychology. In a conversation with Rogers in 1957, Buber

elaborated his view on the concepts of person and individual. He claims that Rogers' distinction between the two is not wide enough. His advice is to keep them apart and argues that an individual is only a certain uniqueness in a human being, who can develop just by developing its uniqueness, without becoming more human. A person, in contrast, is an individual involved with the world. By this he means in full contact, in true reciprocity with the world at all points where the world can meet man. This is what Buber would call a person (Rogers, 1990: 63).

Pedagogies beginning from this outlook on psychology will evaluate the personal side of learners. In the pluralistic classroom, emphasis on the person could prove to promote a deeper understanding of commonalities and a means to build relationships where learners see each other from the standpoint of who they are and not what they are (Greene, 1993). Buber sees human relationship as a mirror of the fundamental relation between man and God, or man and life. This relationship is a mirror more of an ontological or metaphysical orientation than an epistemological one. From Buber's perspective there are three forms of dialogue or relationship:

- Real dialogue where a person, I, turn to the other, You, in a totally trustful encounter
- Technical dialogue where interactions and understanding are promoted
- A conversation that is more monologue than dialogue with the purpose of conveying a message

The ideas underpinning Buber's perception of real dialogue is that in the encounter between two persons, I and You, human existence is confirmed and accepted. It is a dynamic process with the possibility of stimulating each participant to grow and fulfil her/his potential as a human being, to become more human. There are immense positive expectations in this view of human potential. In real interactions where the whole person is recognised, concern for and interest in

the person are not only felt for her/his present state and situation, but what s/he can become in the future. In this holistic view every person is seen as a personality (Steinsholdt and Løvlie, 2004: 441). Since Buber's ideas have constructively informed action research, particularly the living theory of practice promoted by Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead, a closer look at how these AR theorists have been influenced by Buber, seems useful at this point.

2.17.2 Relationships from an Action Research perspective

Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead find Buber's ideas of relationship very useful for their living theory of practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 91-92). They claim that the attitude with which a person settles into the expectation of a dialogue has to be based on attentiveness, in a silence full of anticipation which they call a pregnant silence. In this way we prepare to give the other our full and undivided attention. Referring to Buber, they claim that this attitude can be compared to the attitude which religious people bring to prayer. Only this kind of attitude can fully demonstrate a 'person-to-person' attitude as opposed to a 'status-to-person' attitude (Mcdonald (1995) cited in McNiff and Whitehead (2006: 91). In a school context, teachers should be encouraged to meet learners in this affirmative way, where they 'may hold open the world for a child' and in this way become a significant other in this person's development and growth.

2.17.3 The teacher as the significant other

Leer-Salvesen (1998) talks about the significant other who is able to take an affirmative attitude towards the other. This attitude is, according to the author, extremely powerful in influencing the decisions and moral judgements of those being affirmed in this positive way. This positive confirmation can occur in classrooms, where teachers act as the significant other. For this, teachers must have a positive self-esteem with a concern for their

learners which is greater than their concern for themselves. The outcomes of this teacher role are a good learning environment and a fostering of positive self-concepts in learners (Borich, 1999: 105-106).

2.17.4 Promoting positive relationships in the context of a school

The research of Nias (1989) among primary school teachers in England focuses on the significance and value of personal relationship within a wider professional culture of teaching. Nias and her colleagues find that shared values, personal openness, trust, kindness, help and support not only influence teachers socially, but also enrich and energize the teaching and teachers' readiness to innovate (Nias, 1989: 57). She argues:

> …The fact that the staff saw each others as friends spilled over into the way in which they tackled their work, making it hard to maintain a distinction between personal and professional interdependence…
>
> (Nias, 1989: 59)

Thus it can be argued that providing a basis for emotional understanding and engagement may enhance professional and academic work in schools. If this is so, the awareness and frameworks for experiencing this significant interdependence of emotions and intellectual enrichment should be created in the education of teachers along with appropriate ways of implementing it in institutional visions and curricular change.

2.18 Relationships in the process of learning to teach

Becoming and being a teacher in a general sense or in such a specific subject area as religious education is a life-long process and is most likely to go on as a continuous development and

growth as long as a teacher goes on teaching. Goodfellow and Sumsion (2000) claim that the process of learning to teach involves learning how to be a teacher not simply learning to do the work of a teacher (Goodfellow and Sumsion, 2000: 247). Thus the qualities and personal attitudes upon which teachers base their interactions with students and colleagues have to be focused. Drawing upon the work of Wideen et al. (1998), they claim that learning to teach is a deeply personal endeavour. In a field-based teacher education investigation, they identified three notions of particular importance related to their professional practice, namely, wisdom, authenticity and passion. A closer look at these concepts and their importance in education may be useful at this point.

Wisdom is defined by the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary as 'the ability to make sensible decisions and give good advice because of experience and knowledge that you have'. It may be derived from the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, meaning practical wisdom (Laursen, 2004: 39, Korthagen and Kessels, 1999: 7). In teaching and learning situations teachers must make judgements and decisions and they have to be responsible and accountable for their responses in a given situation. Thus the qualifications, attitudes and moral insight of the teacher are of great importance for the outcome of the decisions taken. The type of knowledge to use in specific situations is phronesis or wisdom. The question is then: How do student teachers learn to become wise?

Goodfellow and Sumsion (2000) claim that it is important that student teachers are given sufficient time to observe experienced teachers engaging in contextually-oriented professional decision-making. Drawing upon the work of Fish and Coles (1998), they observe that the field-based teacher educators involved in their inquiry tried to encourage student teachers to realise

that professional decisions frequently entail ill-defined situations which involve considerable moral-ethical judgements (Fish and Coles, 1998, cited in Goddfellow and Sumsion, 2000: 248). Accordingly, they tried to inspire the student teachers to develop their own professional wisdom by constructing their own personal-professional knowledge, reflecting on practice and generating their own moral-ethical frameworks for decision-making. Consequently it can be concluded that authentic experience in field-based practice is crucial for developing personal, professional wisdom.

2.19 Authenticity in the process of learning to teach

In a course model within university college based ITE, it is difficult to create authentic frameworks for student teachers to experience what it is like to be a teacher. Such authentic experience is afforded in school-based practice where student teachers have to relate to children of various ages, experienced teachers and parents. In these interactions, student teachers are given appropriate working conditions in which they can see for themselves what being a teacher demands and judge and reflect upon their own abilities and potential for fulfilling the requirements of the task.

Student teachers in my study talk about finding the challenge of personal-professional development more meaningful when they are working as real teachers in a school. Some of these student teachers had personal doubts about whether they could meet the requirements of becoming a teacher and found that they were assured and confirmed in their decision to train as a teacher only after periods of practice in schools. Thus, there seems to be a lack of coherence in the curriculum offered in ITE. Korthagen and Kessels (1999) call for a paradigmatic change in teacher education because traditional teacher education fails to prepare students for the classroom.

Closer interactions and participation in whole developmental plans by all the stakeholders involved in the process of initiating personal-professional development in ITE might remedy this situation. This process needs shared understanding both of common goals, strategies and outcomes. The promotion of autonomy and self-direction have to be embedded in a process of developing contextual understanding and mutually respectful and authentic relationships characterised by trust and caring (Goodfellow and Sumsion 2000: 250). In his influential book called 'The Authentic Teacher' (1966) Clark Moustakas describes the qualities of authentic relationship between adults and children as follows:

> …Relations must be such that the child is free to recognize, express, actualize, and experience his own uniqueness. Teachers help to make this possible when they show they deeply care for the child, respect his invidiality, and accept the child's being without qualification. To permit the child to be and become is not to promote selfishness, but to affirm the truly human self…
>
> (Moustakas, 1966: 33)

According to Moustakas these authentic relationships can only be created by teachers who themselves are able to demonstrate a high degree of authenticity in their interactions with their learners. This cannot be done if a teacher merely takes on the role of a teacher, but only by being a real teacher, a person who promotes trust, understanding and acceptance, thus creating authentic relationships with learners. I would argue that teacher educators should seek to create ways of promoting authenticity within the process of education and the training of student teachers. I believe that my own framework of religious education should constructively contribute to initiating authentic learning experiences for future teachers.

2.19.1 Authenticity in relation to Religious Education

In religious education teachers are faced with the challenge of developing good communities of practice in multicultural, multi-faith and secular contexts. Pluralism exists in all educational contexts, making the construction of creative communities of learning a demanding task for the teacher. Deep existential issues such as the meaning of life, the existence of God, life after death, transcendence and so on have to be addressed with respect, tactfulness and wisdom. Teachers must convey insight and understanding of the concerns of religions, theology and philosophy and the way in which various perceptions and interpretations of their questions influence people's ways of seeing the world, the other and the self.

In 'The Spiral Staircase' (2004) Karen Armstrong argues that in the three Abrahamitic religions she studied, compared and contrasted, she found that the theme of compassion is pivotal to them and all the great religious traditions at their best (Armstrong, 2004: 331). She claims that compassion has been advocated by all the great faiths because it has been found to be the safest and surest means of attaining enlightenment. She argues that:

> …compassion dethrones the ego from the centres of our lives
> and puts others there, breaking down the carapace of selfishness
> that holds us back from an experience of the sacred…
> (Armstrong, 2004: 331)

According to Armstrong, compassion is a transforming habit of mind which can change one's experience of the world. This virtue could prove to be a very important means to promote in RE for grasping the very essence of respect and tolerance and preventing disapproval of other people because of their different, religious beliefs and practices. It could also support the acquiring of

spiritual literacy by motivating learners to explore the message of spirituality in religious texts, rituals, practices and everyday lives.

Noddings (1992) argues that the neglect of spirituality in education is the greatest lack in modern public schooling (Noddings, 1992: 81-85) and sees a number of effects of reintroducing it. Learners who experience it, can for example, find a personally satisfying mode of spirituality and understand alien others better as they learn about various spiritual commitments. The outcomes of this education might develop among learners a genuine and facilitative humility in acknowledging both the beauty and the terror of being one tiny manifestation of a universal quest. Children informed in this way are probably not easily subjected to fanaticism and terrorism (Noddings, 1992: 84). The universal human longing for the spiritual is connected to the search for meaning as the primary motivation in our lives (Frankl, 1985). This longing is a lifelong process, which can be initiated and promoted in schools as well as homes and communities of faith. For the successful initiation of this process teachers play a vital role. Religious education in ITE could train future teachers to be good ‘spiritual stewards’ for pupils (Sinetar, 2000).

2.19.2 Authentic experience and personal-professional development

Goodfellow and Sumsion (2000) found in their study of field-based teacher educators that it was very important for these teacher educators to share their passion for teaching with their student teachers (Goodfellow and Sumsion, 2000: 250). Passion as a strong enthusiasm for and commitment to teaching and being a teacher was regarded as essential in the process of becoming and being a teacher. It also provides the strength to strive to live one’s life authentically in congruence with one’s beliefs and helps teachers to transcend the constraints and

frustrations which they inevitably encounter. By sharing their passion for teaching, these teacher educators found that it helped them develop positive relationships with student teachers.
The French philosopher Luce Irigaray argues that man as humanity comes to presence through his capacity for entering into relations (Irigaray, 2002: 85).

Drawing upon Hargreaves (1997) Goodfellow and Sumsion (2000) claim that passion resonates with others because they recognise passion as genuine with presence. This study highlights the interconnectedness of one's personal and professional selves in teaching and considers it essential that student teachers should have the chance to construct their own personal-professional knowledge, within the context of authentic relationships and with the support of experienced practitioners who were able to draw upon their professional wisdom.

The main difference between teacher educators whose work is confined to a university college and the work of field-based educators seems to be the authentic framework of the workplace. Being in the field, where teaching and learning take place for example in schools, student teachers are offered realistic experiences of what being a teacher implies. Within the university college, however, knowledge and understanding of these realities are promoted but in hypothetical ways, according to the past experiences of teacher educators and student teachers. Thus, it can be concluded that discourses of past experiences inform university college teaching while in field-based teacher training authentic experiences newly acquired inform analyses and discourses. This gap between the teaching and learning experiences in university colleges and schools calls for the construction of more coherent approaches in teacher education.

2.19.3 Reflective practice and authenticity

The inclusive and relational environments in which teaching and learning take place seem to promote a process of reflection in which critical discussions can occur. Brookfield (1995) introduces the term critical reflection, which springs from a concern to create conditions under which people can learn to love one another. Critical reflection alerts practitioners to the forces which prevent this, including division, suspicion and scrambling for advantage, and promotes values such as justice, fairness and compassion and creates learning environments, in which each person is respected, valued and heard (Brookfield, 1995: 26-27). It could be argued that to foster both professional and personal development the quality of the authentic environment where this development takes place is critical.

2.20 A model for reflection in teacher education

According to Nias (1989) it is possible to teach for years without incorporating ‘teacher’ into one’s self-image. This phenomenon was particularly felt in the first decade of teaching among the 50 primary school teachers in England, Nias interviewed over a period of ten years as their careers and lives developed. However, in their second decade of teaching, most of these teachers started to incorporate their professional identity into their self-image.

Based on these findings, I started looking for a model that could initiate this identity-forming process within teacher education. I find the model created by Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) appropriate for this task.

They have developed a model for teaching and learning in teacher education called the onion model. This model takes the shape of circles describing different levels of reflection within the process of learning to teach.

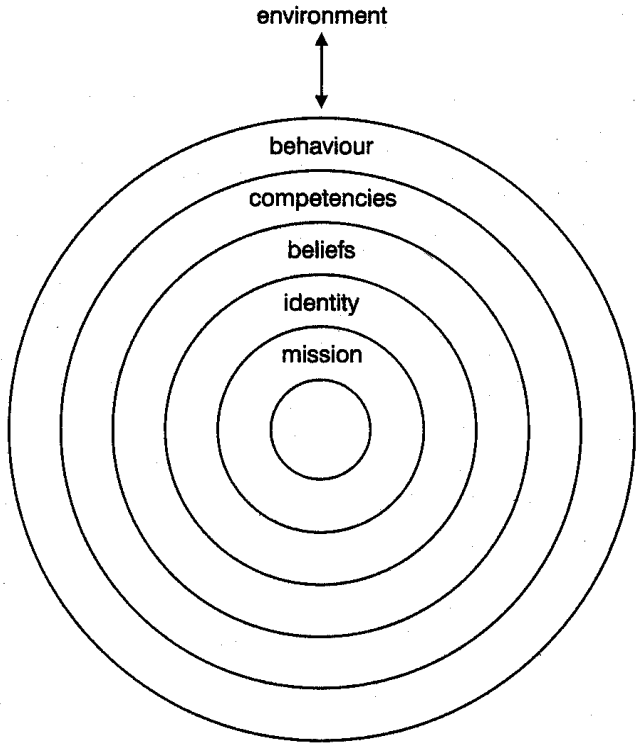

Fig. 2-1: The onion model derived from Korthagen and Vasalos (2005: 54).

This model identifies various levels which can influence the way that a teacher functions. The inner levels determine the way an individual functions on the outer levels, but there is also a reverse influence from outside to inside. This model seems to capture a holistic picture which may constructively inform the process of learning to teach. It could be interpreted as a model which seeks to embrace cognitive, emotional and spiritual literacy.

In my interviews with student teachers in the qualitative part of my empirical study, one of the questions asked was about why these students had chosen to become teachers.

Most of them came up with some personal reasons, as their love for children and young people, love of nature and the possibility of teaching pupils to become environmentally aware and preserve the environment. It was obvious from the enthusiastic way they talked about this that this inner mission influenced their work as future teachers. Parker (1998) claims that good teaching comes from the heart of the teacher. By heart, he means the place where intellect,

emotion and spirit will converge in the self. Hansen (2001) talks about the call or calling to teach. The concept of mission seems to embrace these perspectives for, according to Korthagen (2005: 53), this level has to do with ‘what inspires us and what gives meaning and significance to our lives’. This is a transpersonal level since it involves becoming aware of our own existence in the world and the role which we see for ourselves and our fellows.

Conceptions of teaching have consequences because they influence the way in which teachers not only think about their work, but also how they construct and conduct it (Hansen, 2001). Thus, good teaching involves paying intellectual and moral attention so as to enrich students’ understanding of self, the other and the world and not impoverish it. This means ‘expanding, not contradicting students’ knowledge, insight and interest. It means deepening, not rendering more shallow students’ ways of thinking and feeling’ (Hansen 2001: ix).

The onion model presents identity as the personal perception of oneself and shows how an individual according to personal abilities and talents can be a good teacher. The level of mission will influence this perception in various ways. Consequently teacher educators ought to stimulate a reflective process in which student teachers are encouraged to explore and get in touch with their mission and identity. The question is how this can be done in order for the student teacher to develop on the intended lines? Because of the limited possibilities to influence this development, it may be useful to investigate some creative models and methods aiming at stimulating personal development.

2.20.1 The concept of core reflection

According to Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) core reflection refers to reflection extended to the deepest levels of the onion model (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005: 53). In order to conceptualise

this process, these authors have developed the ALACT model, which describes a structured process of reflection.

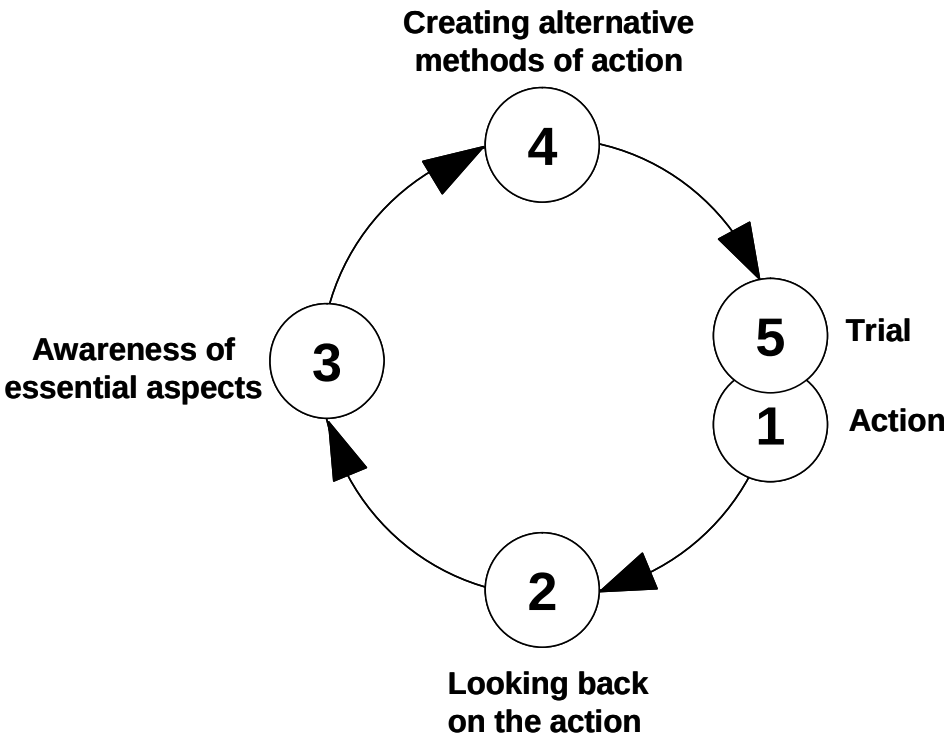

Fig. 2-2: The ALACT model, derived from Korthagen and Vasalos (2005: 49).

As seen in fig. 2.2 there are five steps in this circular model, which together make up the acronym ALACT:

A ction

L ooking back on the action

A wareness of essential aspects

C reating alternative methods of action

T rial

This model is an attempt to structure reflection. The initial phase of applying the model needs some help from a supervisor or a colleague. The authors have expanded the model to help this coaching activity by adding useful interventions which might be employed (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005: 49).

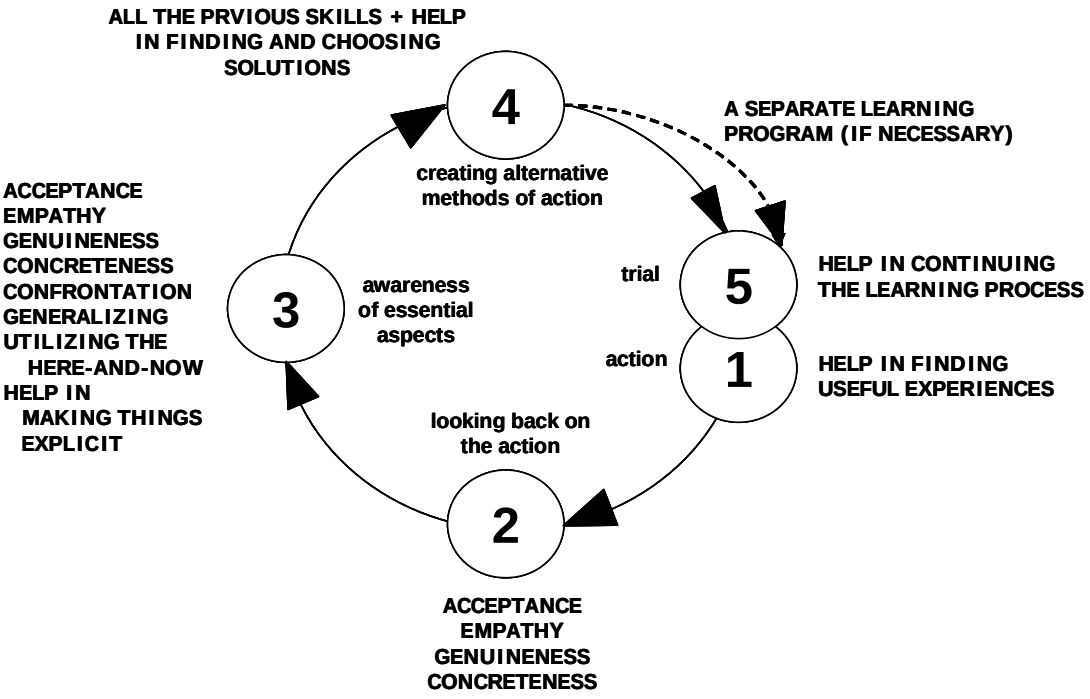

Fig. 2-3: Supervision interventions related to the ALACT model, derived from Korthagen and Vasalos (2005: 49)

Korthagen and Vasalos identify nine areas in learning how to reflect about classroom experience where a core reflection can take place in a student teacher supervision discussion:

0. What was the context?

1. What did you want?	5. What did the pupils want?
2. What did you do?	6. What did the pupils do?

3. What were you thinking?	7. What were the pupils thinking?
4. How did you feel?	8. How did the pupils feel?

Table 2-1: Nine areas relevant for concretising of the activities in fig. 2.2

Asking these questions will focus on important dimensions of wanting, feeling, thinking and doing and will elicit the perspective of both teachers and learners.

It could be argued that this process of reflection will trigger the cognitive, emotional and spiritual competence of future teachers. The authors state that the main aim of this model is to create a holistic approach to teachers and teaching and this could constitute a means to promoting both professional and personal development.

2.21 The ALACT model related to The Learning Conversation

In this study the theory and concretising of the learning conversation (LC) have been implemented (see Chapters One, Four and Six). LC has a specific format based on self-organised learning in which by the help of a learning coach a learner is helped to become self-organised in determining personal learning purposes, learning strategies and possible outcome, defined as PSO. What is the connection between the LC model and the ALACT model? Both are derived from humanistic psychology where the needs of the person are emphasised. Then there are specific questions that have to be asked as shown in Fig.2.3.

Question 1 and question 2 in this table are the same questions as must be asked in the process of determining the learning task and the learning strategy in the learning conversation (see Appendices 2a-b and 3a-b). As this takes place before the activity starts it can only be: What do

you want to learn? This question helps to determine the purpose of the learning activity. Then there is the question of the strategy, so the question will be: What do you want to do? The next step in LC is to focus on the outcome of the learning activity. After this activity has been completed, a second conversation takes place to analyse what actually happened and detect significant differences between intention and action. By this experience the learner, a pupil or a student may be given a deeper understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses and what steps to take to improve performance.

In a teacher education context the two models could complement each other. The LC conversation could be used to plan personal development related to practice, and after this experience, to judge the success of this practice, whereas the ACLAT model could constitute a very useful tool for the learning coach to focus the learning conversation.

While the ALACT model can offer a deeper understanding of the experience of school practice, the theory related to such PCP techniques as the LC, can promote self-assessment and autonomy. Questions should follow such as: What kind of teacher do you want to become? How do you see yourself in five years' time? In this way personal visions and dreams are elicited and the potential and possibilities of individuals may be discussed.

Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) claim that in core reflection there is a focus on creating room for new possibilities as a means to keep the student teachers or teachers closely connected with their level of identity or mission. This focus follows from asking two relevant questions:

- What is the ideal situation? (the situation which the teacher wants to bring about).
- What are the limiting factors preventing the achievement of the ideal?

(Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005: 54).

Reflection on these questions is similar to the reviewing process in the LC where the strengths and the weaknesses of the learner are reflected upon and discussed with the learning coach. In order to facilitate this core reflection, Korthagen and Vasalos create the following additional model as a focus on this process:

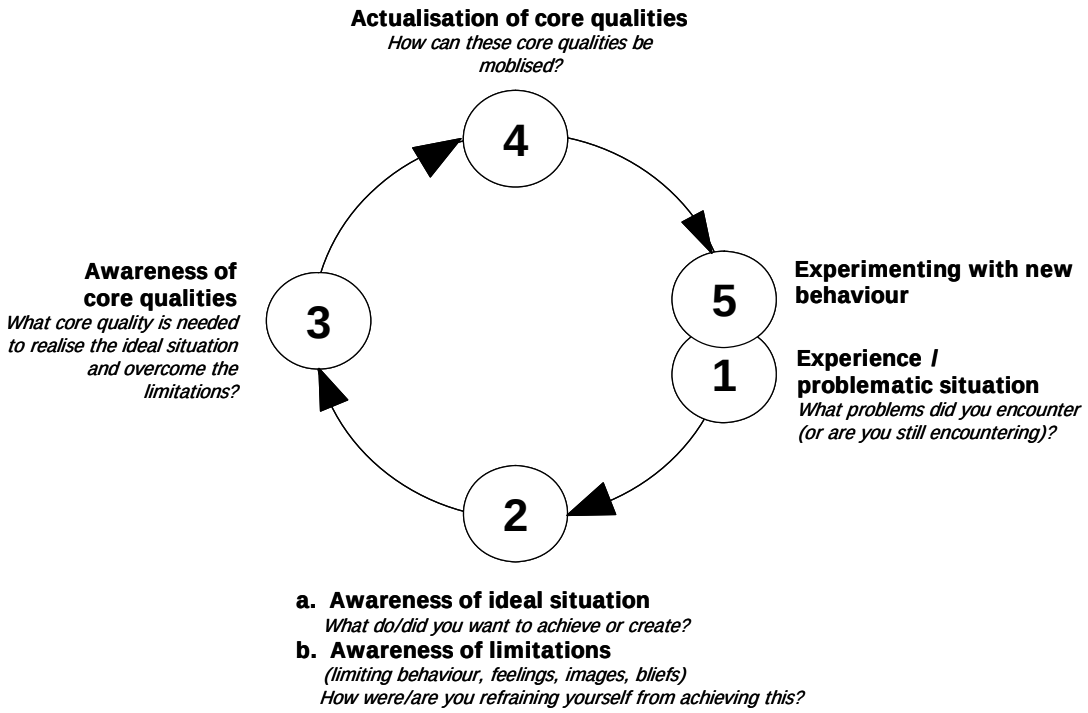

Fig. 2-4 : A model for core reflection, derived from Korthagen and Vasalos (2005: 57)

Even though the limiting factors may be connected to outer factors such as the environment in the school or lack of competencies, a closer examination of behaviour, feelings, images or beliefs can reveal the limits to achieving what one wants, related to the problems of such personal qualities. The myths about learning which Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991) discuss seem to be strongly embedded in a person's previous learning experience. They influence ideas held by individuals concerning what they can learn and what they cannot learn. By means of LC, such personal strengths and weaknesses are explored.

Korthagen and Vasalos underline that the two core questions above allow teachers to take a step back and become aware of the fact that they can choose whether or not to allow these limiting factors to determine their behaviour (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005: 55). Citing Sheldon et al., (2003), the authors argue that this awareness of having a choice is one of the most fundamental factors in a person's development, as it contributes to personal autonomy. This view is supported by Frankl who claims that:

> …man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment…
>
> (Frankl, 1985: 184-154)

Using the myth metaphor of Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991), learners become aware of the myths, understood as obstacles to learning and discover that they can choose strategies to get rid of them. Autonomy and self-organised learning can contribute to coherence in the personal development of a teacher. A self-organised learner, whether a pupil, a student, a teacher or teacher educator, is confident about his/her ability to learn and fulfil his/her potential as a human being. From the perspective of the LC formula, the difference between intention and action will disappear and from the perspective of the ALACT and the onion model, the stronger sides will be realized.

2.22 Positive Psychology

A humanist psychology advocated by George Kelly and Carl Rogers informs the present study in many ways. Theories of Self-Organised Learning, conceptualised in the learning conversation, developed by Laurie Thomas and Sheila Harri-Augstein, have contributed to its holistic thinking about human potential and personal development. In the education of future teachers, teacher

educators and mentors have to regard these coming teachers as healthy and robust adults who can be challenged and motivated to reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses and are able to change and grow (NC, 1997: 36). In order to educate a good teacher we must first define their core qualities and then develop them. The conception of core qualities in people was introduced by Ofman, (2000, cited in Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005: 55). According to Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) there has been very little attention to these qualities among educators and researchers (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005: 55). This view is supported by Ticle (1999) who argues:

> …In policy and practice the identification and development of personal qualities, at the interface between aspects of one's professional life, between personhood and teacherhood, if you will, has had scant attention…
>
> (Ticle: 1999, cited in Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005: 56)

How does Tickle identify these qualities? According to Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) he mentions empathy, compassion, love, flexibility, courage, creativity, sensitivity, decisiveness and spontaneity. These qualities are important to bring out in all human interactions. For a teacher they have to be mirrored in pedagogies and interactions with learners. Even if teachers do not consider these qualities part of their personality, they have to make them part of their professional behaviour (Laursen, 2004). Teacher education has to strengthen the focus on these qualities and create structures in which they can be developed.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) introduce the concept of character strength which is a strategy to emphasize positive traits in individuals. This idea is derived from positive psychology. The authors maintain that the movement of positive psychology is a reaction to the fact that for

too long psychology has focused on weakness and damage done to people and hence on treatment. They emphasize that treatment entails not only mending what is broken, but nurturing what is best. The positive traits in individuals are seen as creativity, courage, perseverance, kindness and fairness. A central issue in positive psychology is the way in which these personal strengths mediate between external events and the quality of experience.

2.22.1 Promoting strength of character

According to Korthagen and Vasalos (2005: 56), the issue of character strength is directly relevant to teacher education and can be located on the levels of identity and mission. Referring to Peterson and Seligman (2003) they argue that character strengths can and do produce desirable outcomes, but also that they are morally valued in their own right, because they 'fulfil an individual'. When people refer to their strengths, this correlates with a feeling of 'this is the real me': they show 'a feeling of excitement when displaying 'strength' and 'a rapid learning curve'. This argument supports a holistic approach to teaching and learning. In a learning environment where character strength is stimulated in the learning process, the inner and outer levels of this process come together and effective learning can take place.

In the education of teachers character strength can promote both professional and personal development. The excitement which Peterson and Seligman describe was experienced by a student teacher in my qualitative study. After the second LC activity this student found it very difficult to talk about her strengths. But when she was given sufficient time to reflect upon it, she was able to come up with a very accurate description of her core qualities. This exercise was extremely important for her, as it gave her more self-confidence and confirmed her inner mission of becoming or being a teacher.

In a tutorial session with her mentor and me, she spoke about her excitement and joy when she had learned to express it. This example demonstrates the importance of creating frameworks where not only skills and competencies which are acquired from the outside and are therefore easier to talk about, but also qualities stemming from deeper levels of personality can be brought to the surface, discussed and evaluated. A student teacher who has developed the ability to talk about these inner levels would probably understand that this ability is important to strengthen in all teaching and learning activities.

Both the learning conversation and the ALACT models are tools which can facilitate the process of creating coherence between the outer and inner levels of reflection. Core values and core qualities underpinning individual choices of behaviour can be made conscious in a fruitful process of reflection. In this way a holistic approach to teaching and learning can take root. The challenge within teacher education institutions is to motivate teacher educators to initiate the implementation of these tools and develop skills of processing them with student teachers. According to the experience of Korthagen and Vasalos (2005: 60), teacher educators when they are introduced to core reflection have to make some adjustments to their mindset. The reason seems to be that within this education one is more accustomed to focus on problems than possibilities. There is also the experience that a smooth introduction to this approach has been found to help participants in core reflection courses to break away from old patterns.

2.22.2 Empathic Communication

The process of educating a teacher has to take place on two main levels which can be described as professional and personal development where self-insight and autonomy, the ability to be self-

organised on the one side and an increased understanding of the learner, on the other, are initiated and developed.This is an ongoing process of personal development and growth which might not end throughout an entire teaching career, as long as teaching and learning activities with learners take place.

I would argue that this process has to be initiated in teacher education where I and my fellow teacher educators are in a position which can positively influence and nourish this process.
If the ability to empathize with 'the other' is a common human personality trait (Kohut, 1986) it still has to be nourished and developed with the purpose of achieving a professional empathic attitudes and behaviour (Brudal, 2006: 21). Brudal is among the strongest advocates for positive psychology in Norway. She argues that the purpose of positive psychology is to 'make normal people stronger' by stimulating them to realize their full potential (Brudal, 2006: 26). She claims that the lack of interest in empathy and empathic communication (EC) which she detects in today's world can be traced to the problems of defining the concept of empathy. Various post-modern theories of man and undiscovered possibilities of human potential have promoted new perspectives and a more tolerant attitude towards empathic communication (see Appendix 1). Empathy is for Brudal a very efficient tool aiming at fulfilling and releasing human potential in a process of emancipation and stabilization.

The doctoral study conducted by Nerdrum (2000) called 'Training of empathic communication for helping professionals', has shown evidence for the efficiency of achieving skills of empathic communication in order to influence attitudes and behaviour among professionals towards others. This study was carried out with groups of social workers, but according to Brudal (2006) and Nerdrum himself (2000) who have deployed this method or tool among various professional

groups, it is efficient in any given context. Accordingly it could be implemented in the education and training of teachers and subsequently in schools.

2.23 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored various aspects which should be considered in the education of a good teacher in religious education. By referring to relevant literature describing theories and research projects, I have emphasized the cognitive, emotional and spiritual literacy needed for the teaching of religious education. The importance of personal development from the perspective of fulfilling human potential has been informed by humanistic and positive psychology.

My search for a model which might promote a holistic approach to the education of teachers came up with the ALACT model which is considered to widen the process of Self-Organised Learning promoted by the Learning Conversation. I assume that if these two tools are combined, effective learning and learning to teaching can take place more constructively than if they were used separately. Used in interactions with future teachers of religious education, they may stimulate a process of reflection in which these teachers are able to address the two important questions related to their identities: Who am I? and Where do I stand? In this process inner levels of reflection and outer levels of experience can be brought together in a continuous dialogic activity about professional and personal development. This might enable student teachers to define personal identity from a more holistic perspective, in which reflection about personal values and mission takes place, bridging the gap between inner and outer levels of reflection.

I am convinced that a good teacher education programme in religious education ought to create ways of work where participants are stimulated not only to reflect about these two core questions, but are also helped to find creative and relevant answers.

I would also argue that introducing them to appropriate tools to help them find their personal answers to these questions, is the responsibility of teacher educators. As I am very well aware of the restrictions of this group of professionals from limited frameworks and lack of time, a constructive remedy for this situation could be the developing of efficient tools. It is obvious that in these circumstances my choice of teaching and learning activities has to be very specific with clear coherence between tasks and purposes.

Empathy, defined by Holm (2001) ‘is the ability to understand other people’s feeling’ (Holm, 2000: 58) and according to Brudal (2006: 22), implies both reflection and focus. She claims that empathy is not only a process taking place between people, but also a process of self-observation. By adding the skills of empathic communication to the tools and methods explored and discussed in this chapter, future teachers, particularly future teachers of RE will be better prepared not only to address these two key question: Who am I? and Where do I stand?, but also be emboldened to give constructive and original answers.

In the next chapter, which is my methodology chapter, I will discuss why I came to acknowledge action research as an appropriate way of conducting my enquiry. In this chapter I describe the planning, reflection and actions which I chose to carry out as my research procedure.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the methodology of this study and discuss its aims, methods, procedures and design. As I was mainly concerned to find out how Norway can educate a good teacher in religious education, promoting both professional and personal development, I wanted not only to understand the situation, but also to try to improve it. Because of the limitations of the context within ITE in which I was operating, I assumed that this improvement could only take place by means of new effective pedagogies. I drew upon the principles of action research to provide guidelines for my research and the implementation of an alternative practice in teacher education.

3.2 Discussion and selection of appropriate research methodology

A research paradigm is connected to philosophical claims including the ontological (what knowledge is), epistemological (how we know it), axiological (what values go into it), rhetorical (how we write about it) and methodological (processes for studying it) (Robson, 2002). There are a number of classifications of research paradigms. Within educational research, Scott and Usher (1996: 11-33) outline the following epistemologies and traditions:

- Positivist/empirical
- Hermeneutic/interpretive
- Critical theory
- Post-modern approaches

These various epistemologies, on analysis, show their main divergence between the positivist/empirical and the hermeneutic/interpretative perspectives. In the former, the world is presented as objective and consists of events or phenomena which are lawlike and orderly (Scott and Usher, 1996: 12). Through systematic observation and scientific methods it is possible to discover this lawlike character and to explain, predict and control events and phenomena.

Kuhn (1970), however, criticizes this understanding of science, research and scientific methods. He argues that our picture of scientific research is essentially philosophical and contrasts the socio-historical practice actually carried out in research communities with the positivist/empiricist picture, especially within the natural sciences, of research as an individual enterprise, carried out by individuals detached from the world which they are researching (Kuhn, 1970: 15). Kuhn defines a paradigm as 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques shared by members of a given scientific community' (Kuhn 1970: 75).

This holistic argument means that a researcher's choice of paradigm will influence the strategy, execution and data analysis within an enquiry (Highland and Finley, 1996: 182). Highland and Finley also claim that the choice of paradigm will be influenced by the researchers' world-views and the empirical questions being asked. Hence researchers must be aware of their world-views and choose a paradigm consistent with them. The subjective aspect of a research project will influence not only the research topic, but also the paradigm, design and methodological approaches of the research. As my research questions have a practical aspect relating to my concern about how to improve my practice, I anticipated that by choosing action research as my research methodology I would be able to investigate and evaluate my work, and create new theories about my practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005: 1).

3.3 Characteristics of Action Research

Action research has much in common with other research in terms of generating knowledge, providing evidence to support this knowledge, making explicit the process of enquiry through which knowledge emerges and linking new knowledge with existing knowledge; it can employ both qualitative and quantitative research techniques (McNiff et al. 1996: 15).

It differs from traditional research because it requires action as an integral part of the research process itself, being focused by the researcher's professional values rather than methodological considerations and it is necessarily insider research, in the sense of requiring practitioners to research their own practice (McNiff et al.1996: 14). McNiff's emphasis on values led me to reflect upon and identify my own educational values and the way in which I communicate or fail to communicate these values in my practice.

3.3.1 Identifying my educational values

As a teacher educator I hold a number of educational values which I want to reproduce and communicate in my practice. In the context of a multi-faith approach to RE some of these values can be identified as honesty, respect, tolerance and equality. Consequently these values are embedded in my epistemology of practice and ought to be explicitly recognised in my interactions with learners, mentors and colleagues.

I see the structure of the RE modules with their limited time schedule and excessively long reading list, as a major hindrance to activities which are aimed at promoting more person-oriented experiences. Thus I have to create course designs and ways of work which will have to

be carefully chosen and critically examined. The fact that many students do not attend the RE lectures and seminars raised concerns about the effectiveness of my own teaching and the teaching and learning activities in the RE department. I have to underline the fact that because there is no compulsory attendance at lectures and seminars, student teachers are generally very selective about activities going on in the college, whatever their subject discipline.

Nevertheless, I continued to hope that the teaching and learning activities carried out with my students would be so successfully devised that they would all attend and show a higher degree of responsibility for the success of the RE course. In order to ensure this I needed to increase my understanding of my work, particularly my students' situations and views, and to find ways of embodying my clear purpose of bridging the gap between theory and practice. I assumed this understanding and insight to be important for creating more inclusive and relational interactions with my students.

3.4 Rationale for selection of Action Research as my mode of study

Research is about generating new knowledge. AR creates new knowledge based on enquiries conducted within specific and often practical contexts with the purpose of learning through action leading to personal and professional development (Koshy, 2005: 3).

As a practitioner, I am committed to a continuous improvement of my own learning and at the same time am able to offer explanations for how and why I am doing what I do (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). I anticipated that the new theoretical platform which would emerge from my AR enquiry could constructively inform my interactions with future teachers. I assumed that this

new platform would convey a picture of purposeful actions grounded in relevant knowledge and theories about the processes of learning and learning to teach.

Accordingly, the reason for my choice of AR as my mode of study is related to my personal situation. I am a practitioner who is doing my research within a given social situation in ITE, in Norway, at BUC. In this situation I am an insider well positioned to influence what is happening (McNiff et al. 2003: 12). Consequently I am inevitably included in the personal change process which I want to see and experience in myself and my own practice, in addition to the change among other participants, mentors and student teachers.

By engaging in this process of change as a teacher educator, I hope to gain a better understanding of the way in which this process can be stimulated among a group of student teachers and teachers/mentors, including me. I also want to learn how a context conducive to active participation in this process can be constructed. Given the inadequate and limited framework of RE in TE, I want to explore the most appropriate and efficient tools or pedagogies for promoting these processes.

3.4.1 The social aspect of Action Research

Action research, according to McNiff et al., (2003: 12) is about individuals' learning in relation to others. Thus AR has both a personal and a social aim, improving learning among participants and improving the situation as a whole. From the standpoint of positive psychology a healthy balance between self interest and care for others has to be created in order to promote human growth and development (Nafstad, 2005). Kasser et al., (2003) argue that:

> …A healthy community is based on people helping one another,
> on co-operation, and on mutual trust…
> (Kasser and Kanner, 2003:21)

In the literature review I discussed how change and transformation can take place within the education of teachers by means of such effective pedagogical tools as LC which can be seen to promote the above mentioned values, as argued by Kasser and Kanner, (2003: 21).
AR improves learning in order to improve educational practices. As a practitioner-researcher I also want to generate knowledge and theories about learning and practice.

3.5 The 'Living Contradiction' theory

Whitehead (2000) introduces the concept of 'I' as a 'living contradiction', (Whiteehad, 2000). It occurs when a teacher recognises that s/he holds specific values and yet denies them in practice. I feel sympathetic to this idea, as I am often aware of contradicting in my practice the values which I believe in. Consequently I am concerned to improve my practice in order to show clearer coherence between my beliefs and what I actually do.

As undertaking an AR project involves asking questions about what we are doing and why and how we can evaluate our practice in terms of the values we hold, I anticipated that my AR enquiry would help me to have fewer contradictions (McNiff et al., 1996).
Action research, according to McNiff et al., (1996), has a methodological approach based on a spiral which can be presented in the following form:

- I experience a concern when my values are negated in my practice
- I imagine a way forward

- I act
- I evaluate
- I modify my concern, my ideas in the light of my evaluation

It is to be noted that experienced action researchers might find this prescription both rigid and idealised, because events do not always follow this sequence (McNiff, 2000). McNiff claims that the research is in the action and that learning is in the practice. Consequently an important part of an AR enquiry is to make sense of what happens in the action phase. Thus the trial and error involved in this action are central to AR and this type of research is all about learning.
My challenge as a teacher educator who is researching her own practice is to develop my ideas into a plan for action which is flexible and open to change and amendments.

3.6 Creating a representation appropriate for living forms of theory

McNiff and Whitehead (2006) identify three forms of representation appropriate to the propositional, dialectical or the living forms of theory. Propositional forms of theory are represented as written texts on a page. These statements within the text are non-contradictory and obey the logic of inference (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 40). Dialectical forms of a theory have until recently been represented as case studies which have been reported in narrative forms (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 41). The legitimacy of narrative accounts has been accepted so long as their validity can be established (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 41). Invoking the work of Bassey (1999) McNiff and Whitehead claim that there is a need to establish new forms of criteria such as authenticity and relatability as appropriate for judging the quality of case studies.

Living forms of theory can be represented linguistically or mimetically through multiple media such as narratives and videos which tell visual narratives (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 41). McNiff and Whitehead claim that the narratives when communicated represent the real lives of people in their interactions with one another. Thus the work shows its own generative transformational potential, in that new learning emerges from previous learning, and any new learning already holds within itself its own potential for improved learning (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 41).

In the present study, it was not possible to produce visual narratives because of the strict rules of respecting anonymity in Norway. I would argue, however, that my research which takes a new departure in its use of an autobiographical narrative, could form the first step in creating a number of new accounts such as might include visual narratives. In several of the LC training courses which I conducted, participants asked for a visual presentation of this procedure. Accordingly, it can be concluded that there is a need to experience a visual narrative of the LC procedures as they are experienced. Consequently in a new AR study, I would like to investigate how this might be done.

3.7 Application of living educational theories

Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) develop the idea of creating living educational theories into primary education by focusing on:

- reflection-on values: being a professional
- reflection-on-practice: resolving teaching concerns

These aspects of a living educational theory for practice were extended into Higher Education by Lomax (1999).

I find these theories of educational practice of particular interest, as they are applicable to my study with their emphasis on the personal development which ensues when professionals start reflecting upon their values and practices, in a process of critical self-judgement. According to my own experience within academic educational research communities, abstract knowledge, defined by Whitehead and McNiff as 'pure kinds of theory', is still held to be the best kind of knowledge, over and above the practical knowledge of practitioners (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 161).

By researching practice and theorizing about it, new epistemological legitimacy both for the value and position of practice and the status and experience of practitioners might challenge the supremacy of abstract knowledge and a more equal position between the two stances, theoretical and practical, might emerge (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 161).

3.8 Action research and educational practice

The connection between AR and teachers or practitioners as researchers is defined by Stenhouse (1975). In reviewing recent literature about AR (Whitehead 1998, 1999, 2000, McNiff , 1993, 1998, 2002, McNiff et al., 2003, McNiff and Whitehead, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, Tiller, 2004, 2006), I detected similarities in the theoretical assumptions and values underpinning this particular approach to research and those of my subject area, religious education. In their multi-cultural classrooms RE teachers are supposed to support and encourage learners to create their own identity and develop ways of living together in peace and harmony in spite of different and

sometimes contrasting cultural and religious or non-religious backgrounds and outlooks (MacGrath, 2001).

Action researchers believe that people are able to create their own identities and try to find ways of accommodating multiple-value perspectives (McNiff, 2002).
It cannot, however, be assumed that this is easy to establish, for, as she argues:

> …Living together successfully requires hard work and considerable effort to understand the other's point of view; this means developing their potentials to care and recognise and suspend their own prejudices…
>
> (McNiff, 2002: 17)

According to McNiff (2002), action researchers often express their ontological assumptions in the language of values. These values are connected to truth, social justice, compassionate ways of living and respect for pluralistic forms. All these values can be identified in the curriculum of religious education for schools and teacher education in Norway. They are defined as guiding principles for the general NC, both in schools and in ITE (NC, 1997, NC, 2005, NCTE, 2003) and are meant to be recognised and communicated in all educational settings. The problem is that frameworks of practice and knowledge about methods of putting these central values and beliefs into practice are not always emphasised in practical educational contexts.

Action researchers seek to understand how contexts can be changed in order to better communicate their values in the future. The change seems to be underpinned by a system of democratic, ethical and person-centred values which promotes the empowerment and

development of the individual (Timmins, 1994). As my main concern is the promotion of personal development in the RE modules in ITE, I find that the values of AR and the values and beliefs which I want to promote in my practice are connected.

3.9 Action Research Procedures

The term 'action research' was first coined by the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946). Lewin's action research model involves a 'spiral of cycles', interpreted by Kemmis (1980) thus:

Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Identifying a general idea Reconnaissance, involving fact finding and analysis General plan, action steps 1-2-3 Implementing action steps 1-2-3 Monitoring implementation and effects Revising general idea	Amended plan, action steps 1-2-3 Implementing next action steps. Monitoring implementation and effects Reconnaissance, explaining any failure to implement and effects Revising general idea	Amended plan steps 1-2-3 Implementing next action steps. Monitoring implementation and effects Reconnaissance, explaining any failure to implement and effects and so on…….

Table 3-1 Action research cycles

Kemmis (1983) sees AR as a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of:

- their own social and educational practices
- their understanding of these practices
- the situations in which the practices are carried out

Elliott (1991: 69) defines AR as: 'the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it'. He proposes some changes to Kemmis' model since he assumes that the general ideas should be allowed to shift and that reconnaissance should involve analysis as

well as fact-finding and should repeatedly recur in the spiral of activities, not only at the beginning. In his discussion about the nature of AR as a label to describe what teacher-researchers were doing, Hopkins (2002: 50) claims that various AR models and their specific features derived from Lewin and marked by an externally initiated intervention, which are functionalist in orientation and prescriptive in practice, might not apply to the nature of classroom research by teachers. He argues that AR is characterized by its orientation towards the practitioner, problem solving and eclecticism. Even if an AR plan might prove to be the most useful as a guide for action, if the researcher feels trapped and constrained by the framework of the model, a more open and flexible approach might ultimately offer more freedom when it comes to interpreting the outcomes of the research (Hopkins, 2002: 50).

AR seems to cover a wide range of research approaches within various organisations and communities. Although models and definitions of AR are varied, they share some common areas of relevance to my research. They promote an idea of the need to research one's own practice with the purpose of exploring the needs, views and difficulties of one's students to see how these needs can be responded or attuned to. This process ought to increase my understanding and knowledge, enabling me to plan better actions and improve future practice. Linking the terms 'action' and 'research' highlights the essential features of AR, trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge (Kemmis and McTaggert, 1992). Action research is 'committed to not only understanding the world, but to changing it' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 186). These authors claim that:

> …unlike interpretive researchers who aim to understand the significance of the past to the present, action researchers aim to transform the present to produce a different future…
>
> (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 183)

I found this claim central to my own project, because I realised that I wanted not only to investigate and understand my particular situation, but to engage and be involved in the change process. Consequently the nature of the task facing me suggested that AR would be the most appropriate way of carrying out my enquiry of which the main aim was to better 'understand the past and transform the present to produce a different future'. My challenge was to decide upon an appropriate AR model and devise specific research approaches which could prove to produce relevant answers to my research questions.

3.10 My research questions and Action Research

My subject area of RE is, as previously mentioned, supposed to promote personal development and growth. Consequently I wanted to promote personal change for myself and in my own practice by means of an efficient research approach. I also wanted to motivate a group of 25 teacher students to construct their knowledge of RE and at the same time engage in a process of self-awareness, personal development and change. By seeking to understand and improve the interactions taking place in the process of learning to teach in RE, I hoped to gain a clearer understanding of the needs of my students and learn how I might create effective teaching and learning activities with the aim of stimulating both professional and personal development among them.

In the first chapter of this study I discussed the problems in achieving these two key aims and in the second chapter, the literature review, I provided some clues to setting up good frameworks for learning and learning to teach and for the transformative processes of personal change and transformation. The literature also provided me with more understanding and knowledge of essential procedures, activities and tools which have proved to encourage good teaching and

learning outcomes in teacher education. With this knowledge I felt prepared to investigate the research questions outlined in Chapter One (section 1.11).

These questions are based on a set of beliefs and assumptions discussed in the two previous chapters about the education of a good teacher in RE.

3.11 Personal Construct Psychology - A Theory of Personality

As my main concern has to do with personal development among future RE teachers, I was looking for a theory from the field of psychology which has been proved to have an impact on individuals' professional and personal change and transformation. Cohen and Manion (1994) claim that Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), developed by George Kelly, is one of the most interesting theories of personality of the last century and is having an increasing impact on educational research (1994: 263). The reason is that it is aimed at individual fulfilment and the maximising of individual potential.

Kelly (1955) calls his epistemological position Constructive Alternativism and describes it as a means of understanding and representing the way in which we construe and interpret the world. Kelly introduces the metaphor of 'man' as a 'scientist', emphasising that persons are constantly testing their anticipation and their understanding of the world (Pope and Denicolo, 2001: 35). According to Kelly, learning is a personal exploration and the role of the teacher is to come to some understanding of the experiments, lines of enquiry and personal strategies used by the learner (Pope & Denicolo, 2001: 37). I found this person-oriented theory in PCP to be relevant to my study, as I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the personal perspectives and the needs of student teachers and how I as a teacher educator could respond to their needs.

3.11.1 The supportive aspect of PCP

Whitehead and McNiff (2006) introduce the concept of academic action researchers as supporters, which is quite different from the role of a lecturer imparting knowledge. In the supporter role an academic practitioner provides emotional and intellectual support to other practitioners/students by encouraging the emergence of their latent knowledge (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 162). At this point in my enquiry, I assumed that PCP could provide effective tools for me to undertake the role of a supporter and that this role would provide the knowledge which I needed. I based this assumption on the experience which I gained from processing a number of LCs with my colleagues, including the mentors and student teachers.

Based on my own experience in the context of ITE, I believe that in order to encourage personal development to take place among future teachers, teachers/mentors and teacher educators, I have to construct a good learning environment based on structure, engagement and empathy (Laursen, 2004). Rogers (1983) introduces the concept of congruence defined as a precondition for empathy and unconditional positive regard. He has worked as a counsellor and found that the promotion of clients' personal development depends on the nature of the relationship between therapist and client. For a successful outcome, therapists have to be in touch with their true selves and with their own needs and feelings, enabling them to relate in an undefensive manner (Timmins, 1998). The notion of unconditional positive regard relates to the counsellor's having a non-possessive, caring and accepting stance towards clients and their difficulties.

Both Kelly's focus on the individual person and his/her unique needs and perspectives and Roger's emphasis on the importance of caring and accepting stances in human relationships have informed my reflection about personal development and ways of promoting this in ITE. My

challenge was to include student teachers, mentors and teacher educators in a learning process with the purpose of enhancing this personal development.

3.12 Self-Organised Learning (SOL), a way forward

The theory of SOL opened a way forward, as it offers appropriate instruments or tools which could be implemented in already existing contexts and ways of work in the RE programme. Aiming at promoting autonomy and self-organised learning it would probably enhance both professional and personal development among a group of future teachers.

Among the various theories of human learning, Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991) have developed the theory of SOL conceptualised in the Learning Conversation (LC), which gave me a tool to deploy as a natural part of the RE curriculum. I found the following reasons for my choice: LC promotes a close relationship between learner and learning coach and it is self-organised. This promotes learner autonomy and freedom to choose a relevant, personal learning task. In discussion about the purpose, strategy and possible outcome of the learning activities, the learner and the coach create a common focus for their work.

Accordingly I saw three practical reasons for choosing LC for my study:

1. mentor-mentee conversations are compulsory in school-based practice
2. there is no particular structure for these conversations
3. LC could give all students an equal framework for discussing their work

I assumed that the experience of the LC would offer a constructive learning process for both mentors and mentees, in which all became learners. This learning would improve communication skills and establish good relationships between the participants. Since mentors in

the present ITE system need no formal training, the quality of mentoring varies from person to person. By introducing an efficient tool for mentor-mentee interactions, I assumed that both parties would be more focused on particular learning tasks and therefore be able to offer constructive feedback in group discussions relating to teaching practice. In this process both student teachers and mentors would be challenged to develop their linguistic skills if they were to describe adequately their personal classroom experiences and their reflection about these experiences.

Finally the theory and application of SOL deal with issues central to AR, as it promotes reflectivity and understanding and inspires individuals to take informed actions in a process of learning-to-change (Harri-Augstein and Webb, 1995).

3.12.1 The LC - a tool for personal development

The work of Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991) has encouraged learners to recognise and achieve their potential through being able to become self-organised as learners. By the help of a facilitator, or a learning coach, learners are encouraged to reflect on their own learning process (Pope and Denicolo, 2000: 33). Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991) ask two central questions:

- How can you improve your learning capabilities?
- How can you enhance your potential for change and personal growth?

They developed the Learning Conversation (LC) as a reflective procedure for exploring the learning process and allowing individuals to develop and grow, professionally and personally. In this structured conversation, the central task for the learner becomes learning-to-learn and the teacher takes on the role of the facilitator.

Gradually the learner internalises the method and becomes self-organised while self-awareness and supported experiments with new behaviour are encouraged and enhanced (Timmins, 1994). Harri-Augstein and Thomas and have extended experience of the implementation of LC in a number of educational and business contexts. As they claim that it allows not only individuals, but also teams and whole organisations, to create dynamic learning cultures, I assumed that LC could engage student teachers, mentors and teacher educators, including myself, in a creative and developmental learning process.

3.12.2 Features of LC

The approach of LC has a structure, based on reflection and actions similar to the cycles of AR. In this structured conversation the first task is to decide a relevant topic for learning as a plan for action. With the support of the learning coach, whose role is to ensure that the learner uses the LC cycle, the learner's system emerges with anticipations, perceptions and needs in relation to the topic (Timmins, 1994). Possible and personally viable actions relating to the chosen topics are then discussed before a plan of action is shaped.

There are three particular features of the plan, defined as purpose (P), strategy (S) and outcome (O). These elements are identified in a plan of action in relation to the topic, the purpose of the action defined, the strategies to be used and the outcomes to be obtained. This discussion is designed and managed in order to promote self-awareness, reflection and autonomy. A deeper understanding of learning processes and how coherence between P, S and O can be obtained are the main characteristics of this procedure. P is the purpose of the work, what the learner wants to achieve, S is the strategy or what the learner intends to do in order to reach the intended purpose and O is the outcome or the result of the work carried out by the action(s).

In the first step of the conversation, after setting out a plan to make changes to action, the pair decide a date for a review of what actually took place and the learner is then given a reasonable time to put her/his plan for action into practice. In this way the learner is committed to acting and doing his/her best to put into action what has been decided upon. In the context of the classroom, the teacher, or coach/facilitator is committed to observing, supporting and helping the learner in the effort to fulfil the plan of action. In these interactions the coach has to show a high degree of empathic communication in order to motivate the learner to reflect, ask good and constructive questions and consider appropriate strategies or plans of action. For student teachers this aspect of the overall learning process is contextualised in classroom performances and interactions. In these the coach/mentor has to observe how well the learner/student teacher is putting the working plan into practice and to give feedback which might help the learner to be focused and act purposefully.

A series of LCs carried out over time gradually allow learners to appreciate, elaborate and extend their understanding of the processes which drive action in relation to the topic selected (Timmins, 1994). The conversations promote reflection based on actions since it allows teachers/mentors to plan for a lesson or part of a lesson and then to reflect upon the effectiveness of plans and achievements as an ongoing activity. Thus a prepared structure of teaching and learning gives focus to the predetermined and self-oriented learning tasks and purposes.
In the mentor-mentee situations from which data were gathered, LC is designed to generate trust and confidence as feedback was based on planned actions and offered and received as valuable input and not as threatening criticism. Thus I anticipated that feedback could be more constructive than it generally is. In Chapters 4 and 6 I will consider the extent to which this actually happened.

It can be concluded that the spiral characteristics of AR seem to relate to the repetitive procedures of LC. The planning and review phases of the LC equate to the first cycle of AR and this procedure seems to add to the usual AR cycle in the way of structure and process as demonstrated in the following table :

S-OL: The first LC: The planning phase	**SOL: The second LC: The review phase**	**AR: First cycle**	**AR: Second cycle**
Identify the learning task with the support of the coach/mentor	Meet again to discuss the learning task	Diagnosing	Diagnosing/ evaluating
Discuss and define the purpose of the learning	Identify differences between planned purpose and maintained purpose	Planning action	Planning action
Discuss and decide upon the strategy to follow and possible outcome Put plan into action	Identify differences between planned actions and realized actions, outcomes planned and outcomes attained	Taking action	Taking action
Make plan to meet again to evaluate the result	Evaluate the result Identify strengths and weaknesses	Evaluating action	Evaluating action

Table 3-2: The LC Procedure and AR cycles compared

It will be seen that both the AR and the LC processes have a collaborative characteristic, since they bring in other people. In AR the support and critical feedback from a critical friend add to the validity of the study (Campbell et al., 2004: 106-111).

The SOL/LC process brings in a coach who works closely with the learner (Cossentino, 2004). This aspect is quite unique and very well may ensure the effectiveness of the LC. The attentiveness of the coach in supporting the reflection of the learner and responding to the specific needs raised by the chosen topic inevitably adds to the success of this approach.

In the context of ITE, in the difficult task of reflecting upon personal strengths and weaknesses as part of the LC the student teacher is supported by the mentor, who has to use tact and sensitivity framed in the language of the LC, which empowers students to be frank and open (van Manen, 2002).

Both of them have to engage in a process of personal development and growth with the possible outcome of gaining more insight in the process of learning-to-teach and establishing a closer human relationship. In this relationship there is a common focus, a reflection-on-action in action (Schön, 1983). Even if this focus is mainly on the experience of the student teacher, the mentor experiences a process of learning in trying to respond adequately to the task of a learning coach. S/he is challenged to help the student teacher to be focused and to facilitate the discussion by asking relevant questions in a supportive and caring attitude shown in words and body language.

3.13 The research context

The prime feature of AR is that it is essentially an on-the-spot or in-situ procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation (Cohen and Manion, 1994). In my position, I am responsible for a group of about 25 student teachers who attend a one-year course module, qualifying for a general certificate to teach in primary and upper secondary schools in Norway. Since RE is a compulsory subject in our schools, it is also compulsory in ITE. Course modules in RE have to be carefully and creatively designed in order to promote knowledge in the various subject areas and the skills of teaching RE to children from 6 to 16 years old.

During a course week, student teachers attend an introductory plenary lecture of two hours in a particular topic followed by a group session of 4-5 hours where a lecturer works with groups of students, using various teaching and learning approaches. The RE programme consists of about 22 course weeks, 11 weeks in each of the two terms of a study year. As previously mentioned, there is no compulsory attendance at either of these activities, the lectures or classroom sessions,

so it is important to create ways of work which students will find interesting and productive for their individual needs. Assessment is based on exam results and reports from school practice.

When I started my research project, I had about five years of practical experience of living with the multi-faith RE approach in ITE, and about eight years as a teacher educator in the previous form of RE where the perspective was predominantly Christian. I had all the insider knowledge connected to this education, for example, knowledge of curriculum content, structure of the programme, student interests and priorities. Even if I felt that I was a rather good RE teacher educator, judging from the evaluation and feedback from students and colleagues, I was never quite satisfied with my practice. I wanted my students to become active constructors of meaning and understanding in the process of becoming and being RE teachers. I experienced that many students were driven by exam-oriented activities and asked for lectures on topics from the reading list. In this situation they took notes which they counted on reproducing for the exam. Many of these exam papers, which I read, both as an internal examiner in my own college and as an external examiner for other colleges, did not deepen my understanding and reflection about how the new RE could be creatively shaped in the context of the classroom. Most of them reproduced a knowledge of the RE content and contained very little reflection and discussions about appropriate RE pedagogies.

This experience raised some concern about the inadequacies of our RE programme and made me reflect upon possible ways of improving the situation. I am convinced that the pedagogies appropriate for a multi-faith approach to RE have to be creative and varied to meet the needs of all learners in the multi-cultural classroom. The inspiration for creating such pedagogies has to come from teacher education, but, unfortunately, it sometimes fails to do so. Lack of time and

the limited structures of the RE course modules have already been identified as serious hindrances to constructing appropriate frameworks for deepening the maturity of students to the level required for creating constructive and successful ways of working in the RE classroom.

Another problem is the lack of concern or lack of training among teacher educators to teach teachers well (Korthagen, 2001: 239). Korthagen claims that the available literature pays little attention to the professional development of teacher educators (Korthagen, 2001: 253).

Faced with these serious problems, my solution was to create an AR enquiry which could investigate the situation, involve change processes and enhance my personal intellectual learning with the purpose of giving me a deeper understanding of the process of learning to teach RE. With this I would be able to improve my practice and construct better course modules for my students. I had a vision of what an ideal course in RE would be, a vision of an RE course which would be so successful that my students could copy the teaching and learning activities which we had devised and would want to use them in their RE classrooms.

In addition to the problems I have described so far, I had also detected a lack of coherence between theory and practice, between activities going on within the context of my university college and in schools. One of the main reasons for this situation was the poor collaboration between teacher educators and teachers/mentors in schools. Another was the quality of mentoring, which seems to vary from person to person. Some mentors were very experienced and had participated in in-service training courses offered by our college, while others based their work with student teachers only on their own teaching experience and skills.

This problem became a major concern, not only for me, but also for my students. Even if equality is an important value in the curriculum, we were not able to offer equal opportunities for students when they did their practice in schools. I realised that change had to be implemented both in my own practice in the department of RE and in the way that we work with mentors in schools.

3.14 Overview of research participants and procedures for the study

In the first two years of my PhD, from 2000/2001 to 2002/2003, I was a part-time student and my first AR cycle was set up with my own students, a group of 25 students and 7 mentors who worked with these students during two field-based practice periods. All these student teachers and mentors had brief training in the use of the LC in order to implement this approach in their work. One of the mentors who participated in the research also took on the role of critical friend, whom I shall call Anna. She became an important supporter and adviser in the research process and took an active part in the preparation and process of the first and second cycles of research.

In the first cycle of research the student teachers during their practice period were trained in and applied the LC procedure, with the support of their mentors. They generated valuable information about the effectiveness of the procedures and how appropriate they were in the context of field-based teaching practice. These data were mainly produced through observational field-notes, informal conversations and interviews. Anna, who was working with student teachers in this process, experienced problems with the way in which LC was composed, particularly the language used for the various steps of the process. In our evaluation meetings

following the implementation of the first cycle, we shared our experiences and ideas, discussing these problems and deciding how to overcome them.

Early in this first AR cycle there was a need to get a fresh feedback or assessment from students who had successfully completed the RE programmes in the college, including my own students. Consequently a survey was conducted among these students who were in their third year of the ITE programme. By this intervention, I wanted to get a broader and clearer picture of RE students' views and experiences. I was particularly interested to know more about their practice experience and their views on the quality of mentoring and experiences of teaching and learning activities in schools. The survey, carried out in the study year of 2002/2003, generated 121 responses from my own college, BUC.

Given the fact that all TE colleges in Norway have to implement the same general NC, I conducted a similar survey in the Norwegian Learning Academy, NLA, the second TE institution in Bergen. This survey generated 58 responses, giving me a total of 179 responses. Even though these two institutions must be guided by the same NC, the two institutions differ in ideological perspectives, since BUC is a state college and NLA is a private Christian/Lutheran college. A comparison of the efficiency and success of RE in these two institutions could be of interest for the study

The second cycle of the study, following the first one, was carried on in the first year of my three-year full time study leave, in the study year of 2003/2004. As I was not teaching in the college at that time, I enlisted the support of a colleague in the RE department and worked with some of his students to carry out the second intervention using LC. I planned to engage the team

of the seven mentors who had had the experience of processing LC in the first cycle of research to continue in the second cycle with a new cohort of students.

All the seven mentors who took part in first AR cycle of 2002/2003 found this experience so interesting and helpful in their mentoring task that they responded positively to the second sequence which I intended to carry out in the study year of 2003/2004.This was very encouraging for the success of continuing the interventions. I also found that it would be easier to implement the second LC approach with people whom I already knew.

Unfortunately in this particular academic year, 2003/2004, BUC, decided to implement a new procedure in their co-operation with practice schools, preventing all but one of the mentors who had had the experience of processing LC the year before from continuing. The one who remained was, however, an experienced teacher and mentor and the leader of the team of seven mentors who were part of the college's new procedure. This team of mentors then worked with the 25 students in my colleague's group of students. Nevertheless, I found this situation difficult to handle and spent a lot of time reflecting upon how to go on. There was a risk that students would feel anxious about participating in the study and engaging in the process of the LC under mentors who were taking on the role of learning coaches with no previous experience.

The solution to this situation was to use some time to introduce the seven mentors for this chosen group of student teachers to the procedures of LC and try to inspire them to use it with their students. This preparatory session was chaired by the team leader, the only mentor who had taken part in the first implementation of LC. After I had briefly introduced the group to SOL and the techniques of LC by means of its format, the team leader shared her experiences, which were

very positive, with the six new mentors. The result was that they all agreed to try to use this structured conversation with the students in their practice period.

In order to build up trust and enthusiasm to participate in the study, I sought the co-operation of my colleague in RE, who gave me some time (about 2 hours) in two of his 5 hour-RE seminars to present SOL and familiarise the students with the procedures of LC. We organised a trial in the classroom where students acted out the roles of learners and coaches. As preparation for the practice period, students were given the task of defining and reflecting upon their learning task, for I expected that the new mentors could have some difficulty in processing the LC procedure without previous experience.

The encouraging thing was that students reacted very positively to the possibility of implementing LC as a structured conversation with their mentors. In a plenary session some of them shared previous negative experiences of their conversations with mentors, although it must be admitted that others were quite satisfied with them. In sum, there was a widespread view that some improvements were necessary and that the structured LC format was worth a try as an attempt to provide good practice for everybody.

Having explored the experience of student teachers and the effect of an alternative practice, there was a need to explore the experience of teacher educators. My third AR cycle was set up as a case study in which I would interview 6 teacher educators, 4 in RE and 2 in Pedagogy. The latter had taken part in the first LC workshop and could consequently inform my study from this perspective.

3.15 My Action Research model

Having outlined the specifications of my enquiry I started looking for a research model which could best illustrate the activities proposed in my research. In order to answer my three research questions, I devised three AR cycles, inspired by Kemmis' model presented in 3.7. and incorporating the five spiral activities, suggested by McNiff and outlined in 3.5.

3.15.1 First Action Research Cycle

Reconnaissance and first run of an alternative practice

Table 3. 3: Simplified version of the first Action Research plan

MY CONCERN	**Research question 1** What effects would an alternative teaching and learning practice, informed by SOL and the process of LCs have on a group of student teacher's professional and personal development? a) Would the student teachers be able to assume a greater degree of control over their personal development? b) Would the student teachers by means of this approach be able to find their own strengths and weaknesses and thereby find their own authentic voices as teachers? c) What are the barriers to student teachers and mentors in implementing this alternative practice?

↓ ↓

I IMAGINE A WAY FORWARD	**Reconnaissance – fact finding** **Data required** Student teachers' and mentors' experience of SOL Student teachers' evaluation of current experience in ITE Observational notes and log based on my own experience Reflective diary **Methods** Informal conversations with student teachers, colleagues and mentors Questionnaire Informal conversations with my critical friend, Anna Descriptions and accounts of experience of school-based practice and interactions Interviews with student teachers and mentors **Plan for action** Identify current problematic areas in current practice Literature search on TE Review official documents/NC for ITE and schools, particularly those concerned with RE Design, prepare and run an alternative practice based on SOL/LC Foster skills of promoting LC by means of workshop and seminars Discover students teachers' and mentors' reactions and evaluation of SOL/LC

↓ ↓

I ACT	**Actions taken** I put into action the alternative practice by means of SOL/LC I administered a questionnaire in BUC and NLA I visited 7 schools to investigate the success or failure of SOL/LC I interviewed the participants who had processed SOL/LC successfully, 7 student teachers and 2 mentors I revisited the 2 schools where SOL/LC had been successfully implemented I carried out 2 informal interviews with these 2 mentors I took field notes I reflected I read and thought

↓ ↓

I EVALUATE	**Evaluation** I evaluated and reflected upon the alternative practice by means of my reflective diary I analysed the qualitative data by means of Nvivo soft ware I analysed the quantitative data by means of SPSS soft ware I discussed my findings with my critical friend I discussed my findings with my colleagues in the college I reflected I read and thought

↓

I reflected and amended my plan

3.15.2 Second Action Research Cycle:

Revised plan and second run of an alternative practice

Table 3-4: Simplified version of the second Action Research plan

MY CONCERN	**Research question 2** What effect would SOL and an LC approach to the mentoring of a group of student teachers have on their process of becoming teachers in general and RE teachers in particular?
I IMAGINE A WAY FORWARD	**Reconnaissance – fact finding** **Data required** Student teachers' and mentors' accounts of their SOL/LC experience Observational field notes Reflective diary Notes from informal conversations with my critical friend Salmon Line (SL) and LC documents **Methods** Informal conversations with student teachers, colleagues and mentors Informal conversations with my critical friend, Anna Collecting SOL/LC documents Interviews with student teachers and mentors Literature search **Plan for action** Prepare a second LC intervention by means of workshop and seminars Prepare a self-assessment activity based on SL among a group of student teachers Search the literature Prepare and conduct interviews among a group of student teachers Discuss issues of relevance for my research with my critical friend and colleagues
I ACT	**Actions taken** I put into action the alternative practice I interviewed 22 student teachers, audio-taped and transcribed these interviews I collected SL documents and LC formats I read I reflected I developed my autobiographical account

I **E** **V** **A** **L** **U** **A** **T** **E**	**Evaluation** I analysed the transcripts of the audio-taped interviews I analysed the LC formats and SL-documents I discussed my findings with my critical friend

↓

I reflected and amended my plan

3.15.3 Third Action Research Cycle

Revised plan and third run of an alternative practice

Table 3-5: Simplified version of the action research plans and cycles

M **Y** **C** **O** **N** **C** **E** **R** **N**	**Research question 3** 1. What changes would I and my colleagues need to make in our practices as teacher educators in order to promote active participation in this alternative practice among groups of student teachers and mentors? a)What changes in the practice of the ITE college and the practice of their practice schools have to be made in implementing this alternative practice?

↓ ↓

I I M A G I N E A W A Y F O R W A R D	**Reconnaissance- fact finding** **Data required** Clarification of my personnel educational values and beliefs and those of some of my colleagues Description of the way in which we communicate or fail to communicate these values and beliefs in our practices My reflections and understanding of the process of learning to teach and the student teachers' professional and personnel development. Reflections and understanding by some of my colleagues' in RE, in BUC and NLA, of the same process. Methods of promotion of professional and personnel development from the perspective of two teacher educators in Pedagogy. **Methods** Interview with 6 teacher educators Reflective diary Informal conversations with my critical friend **Plan for Action** Plan and prepare the interviews

↓ ↓

I A C T	**Actions taken** I carried out the interviews with 6 interviewees I transcribed the audio-taped interviews I read and reflected I developed my autobiographical account

↓ ↓

I E V A L U A T E	**Evaluation** I analysed the transcripts of the audio-taped interviews I discussed my findings with my critical friend

↓

I reflected and amended my AR plan to form a new plan

In Chapters 4 and 5 I will present the findings and analysis of the first cycle, while in Chapter 6 I will present those from the second cycle and finally in Chapter 7 I present those from the third cycle.

3.16 Claims to knowledge

Having presented my AR model as simplified plans of what I actually did, in order to be able to answer my three main research questions, I have to show that my claims to knowledge are reasonably fair and accurate. Whitehead and McNiff (2006) introduced three important concepts by which these claims could be addressed:

1. Validity and legitimacy
2. Social validity
3. Ethical validity

(Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 98)

Validity and legitimacy are, according to these authors, different but interrelated concepts. While validity is about establishing the true value or trustworthiness of a claim to knowledge, legitimacy is about establishing the authority of the person who is making the claim to knowledge. How can I establish the validity and the legitimacy of my claims to knowledge?

When I started reflecting upon this question, I realised that what I have done in my study could only be done by me and consequently I was able to draw my conclusions based on my own authentic work. My experience, knowledge and understanding of teaching and the process of learning to teach helped me to find and read relevant literature which could constructively inform my reflection and stimulate my thinking. In this process I discovered that I had a lot of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1958), derived from many years of practice. As a practitioner I am constantly evaluating my practice in order to improve not only what I do but also myself. Thus I would argue that I was constantly involved in a process of AR before I ever started to investigate this process in a scientific way. The fact that I was able to identify my personnel practice

experience in theoretical descriptions in relevant research literature made me believe in the authority of my own scholarship.

McNiff (2002) argues that a process of self-validation is a necessary process in AR.
In my experience, this transformative process made me believe that I could establish the validity and legitimacy of my research and present my research account in a scholarly way. From this perspective I was involved in my own internal processes of critical reflection to validate my beliefs and my claims to knowledge.

3.16.1 Social validity

Social validity is defined by Whitehead and McNiff, (2006) as 'criteria and standards of judgement for establishing the validity and legitimacy of your research'.
In order to avoid misunderstandings and mistakes in how I validate my work, it has to be scrutinized by other people who can look more objectively at it, give constructive feedback and make criticisms in order to improve future actions. McNiff (2002) calls these people critical friends. According to Campbell et al., (2004), Elbutt (1985) promoted the use of a critical friend in educational research. By referring to Day (1999), these writers claim that a critical friend who is involved in some research is recognised as having knowledge, experience and skills which are complementary. They argue:

> …While there is a notion of friendship in the roles of a teacher as critical friend, collaborator and peer scrutineer, there is also a notion of challenge and confrontation for the purpose of development…
>
> (Campbell et al., 2004: 107)

In my case, I first invited a mentor, Anna, to participate in my research (see 3.13) as my critical friend. She was a very experienced primary school teacher, with whom I had been co-operating earlier. As SOL and LC had been developed in the UK, we first had to become acquainted with these techniques and then we had to translate the structured conversation, the LC format, into Norwegian and test it in our various educational contexts. Anna and I exchanged our ideas and findings by e-mails and face-to-face. She came to Birmingham to participate in a workshop which presented the theories and procedures of SOL and LC.

We planned and organised a similar workshop which was held in Bergen University College in January 2003 and repeated in August the same year. I also invited two colleagues from the Department of Pedagogy to discuss my research proposals and findings, reported in Chapter 7. They acted as supportive listeners and advisers during the research period.
The discussions and critical feedback from Anna were extremely important for the challenge of putting the SOL procedure and LC process into words which could constructively help the participants to advance and avoid confusion and misunderstanding.

Anna was the person who was closest to this process, having a group of student teachers to mentor in their school-based practice, and was able to detect the needed changes in the wordings of the LC. These two formats, the first implemented in first AR cycle and the revised version, implemented in the second are presented in Appendices 2a-b and 3a-b.

3.16.2 Ethical validity

Ethical validity is seen as criteria and standards for transforming social criteria into moral standards of judgement (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 106). This implies that a research account has to be comprehensible, truthful, sincere and appropriate. Elements of self-reflection

and critical self-interrogation transform the process of establishing social validity into a process of establishing ethical validity.

In order to transform social validity into ethical validity, it was important for my as a researcher and also for my critical friend Anna to demonstrate a caring and supportive attitude in our interactions and in the relationships with our students.

The models presented in Chapter 2 helped us in this process, particularly the Onion model, derived from Korthagen and Vasalos (see 2.20). From Korthagen et al. (2001) we picked the following Chinese proverb:

> Tell me and I will forget
>
> Show me and I will remember
>
> Involve me and I will understand
>
> Step back and I will act
>
> Korthagen et al., (2001: 32)

In our discussions we shared our ideas about how the attitudes implied by these words could be communicated in our practices to student teachers and to learners in the classroom. We used processes of SOL/LC to strengthen our relationship and promote interactions of constructive communication in an atmosphere of trust and care. In addition, I participated in the EC training course facilitated by Lisbeth Brudal and shared these new skills with Anna.

3.17 Checking the trustworthiness and authenticity of my research

There are several activities which researchers can pursue as a means to maximising the credibility of their findings. I found that the following activities suggested by Cohen et al., (2000: 108) of relevance to my procedure:

- prolonged engagement in the field
- checking with members (respondent validation)

In the following section, I discuss how these measures would have helped to increase the credibility of my data.

3.17.1 Prolonged engagement in the field

The first part of the study was conducted into my own practice at my own workplace. I did the research as a part time researcher and had to take on the full responsibility of a lecturer in RE in a full study year of 20-22 weeks. The first AR cycle of my inquiry was carried out in this period. I implemented the intervention and visited 7 schools to observe my students' teaching and discuss their experience with them. I spent much time in informal conversations with the students and made audio-taped interviews with them. In addition, I went back to each school for meetings and interviews with the mentors and had several meetings with my critical friend. The task of this person is to listen to the researcher's account of practice and to critique the thinking behind the account. The fact that my critical friend was involved in the research process from its initial stage, and had a long period of experience as a mentor helped me also to be critical, accurate and focused in my inquiry.

I prolonged my engagement at the research site for several months to conduct the second AR cycle. This time I included as critical friends, two colleagues (mentioned above) who had participated in the SOL workshops. I had several informal discussions with them in addition to audio-taped interviews.

To evaluate the success of the current RE modules, I extended my quantitative inquiry to the NLA, with the purpose of increasing the number of responses to my questionnaire and of including a comparative analysis of the data.

Most action researchers would argue that time is an issue for the success of the inquiry and that a change process usually takes several years to make an impact (Hockings, 2003).
In ideal circumstances I would have been able to combine my research with my teaching responsibilities for another year in order to spend more time with the students. I would argue, however, that in my case this was impossible due to the demanding nature of combining the work of conducting the research and of lecturing.

3.17.2 Checking with members

Checking with members involves returning to the participants the transcripts and interpretations of their interviews in order to correct factual errors and provide them with a chance to clarify or add further information (Cohen et al., 2000: 108).
I transcribed all the audio-recorded interviews and sent them by e-mail to every participant. All of them sent back either a confirmation that the transcription correctly reported what had been said, or pointed out misunderstandings or errors in the transcripts. In these cases, corrections were made and sent back to the respondents who then returned their replies. This procedure was carried out with student teachers, mentors and teacher educators.

3.18 External validity

External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized or replicated to wider populations, cases or situations (Cohen et al., 2000: 109). In the context of AR such practice is judged to be problematic. As a practitioner-researcher I argue that my research is about my own practice which I have lived and experienced in a particular context and which therefore cannot be studied as an object. Accordingly my report analyses methods for improving practice and cannot be reduced to descriptions of activities (McNiff, 2002).
Action researchers claim that replicability and generalisability are no longer seen as appropriate criteria for their research (Whitehead, 2000, McNiff, 2002).

The intention of my study was to examine my own practice and the context in which we educate RE teachers in BUC, to illuminate and gain insight into one specific situation within the context of a case study. As all ITE colleges in Norway have to abide by the same principles of work, based on the general NC for this education, the conclusions drawn in the study would be relevant to any similar situation or case with a similar group of students within the framework of ITE.

It could not, however, claim to be generalizable to different settings and cultures. Citing Schoefield (1993: 200) Cohen et al., (2000: 108-109) argue that comparability and transferability are two issues which even in qualitative research can still be addressed. In spite of the complexity of my case study, it would probably have been possible to focus on typical features of the situation and test the extent to which these could be transferred to similar situations. The degree of transferability would depend on the degree of similarity between the cases. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 316) argue that in order to do so, sufficient data, or ‘thick description’ must be

provided, (cited in Cohen et al., 2000: 109). As my AR project did not afford this amount of data, I found the criterion of generalisability problematic to apply in my study.

3.19 Ethical considerations

When I started this AR project I was introduced to the ethical guidelines published by BERA (2004).

In addition, I had to inform myself about the ethical guidelines which researchers are supposed to follow in Norway, (www.etikkom.no/retningslinjer). To the best of my ability, I tried to abide by these guidelines which require all participants in my study to have given their agreement to participate and to have been informed about the purpose of the research and how the data would be treated and presented. Further, I have kept all real names and identities of participants confidential and unrecognisable.

During my research period I shared my work with some of my colleagues in order for them to verify the relevancy and accuracy of my research report.

I tried to be as non-intrusive as possible in my data collection by encouraging student teachers, mentors and teachers educators to participate and share their ideas with me. In my face-to-face contact with these participants, in informal conversations and interviews, I tried to create a positive atmosphere and reveal a high degree of empathy in my attitude. My purpose was to create trust and confidence to motivate participants to share their true feelings and inner thoughts with me.

3.20 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show how my beliefs and assumptions underpinned my choices of appropriate methodology for my study. I have drawn upon the principles of action research and the theories and methods derived from Personal Construct Psychology to provide guidelines for researching my own practice and create ways of implementing alternative ways of work. I believe that the methodological choices which I made would have supported the need to explore, implement and evaluate change in the context of a specific group of student teachers, mentors and teacher educators in the context of Initial Teacher Education in Norway. This process would also influence my own practice as a practitioner, a teacher educator in RE, by increasing my intellectual understanding of the situation and would motivate me to implement such change as would communicate my beliefs and values in my practice, with the clear purpose of minimizing contradictions between these values and my actions.

Change in interpersonal relationships is not only a question of time, but also a question of pedagogy. An individual has to be stimulated and encouraged to engage in this kind of process (Brean-Vatne, 2003). Stern (2004) introduces the concept of ‘moments of meeting’ where profound understanding between two parties is created. On this basis, Brean-Vatne introduced the concept of ‘moments of change’ (Brean-Vatne, 2003).

As an educator I believe that these ideas can be transferred to an educational context by means of appropriate pedagogies. I also hold the view that a learner and a teacher can experience real ‘moments of meeting’ in which both of them feel respected and seriously listened to. New perspectives on self and personal potential would then create ‘moments of change’ with a lasting positive impact on future personal development and growth.

In this chapter I have described my research design, conceptualised in my three AR cycles based on my concern or my research questions. The activities which I have outlined in this design or research model are supposed to help me to be able to answer my research questions appropriately. Finally I explained the measures taken to ensure the validity, legitimacy and credibility of this study and the ethical considerations which I bore in mind and the actions taken to respect ethical guidelines throughout my enquiry.

CHAPTER 4

THE FIRST ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 I discuss the first actions which I took in order to introduce an alternative practice. This was meant to bridge the gap between theory and practice, between what we teach in Bergen University College on the subject of religious education and what student teachers experience in classrooms where they carry out their teaching practice. It can be defined as the first AR cycle for evaluating my practice in considering the kind of alternative practice appropriate for the personal development and growth of a group of student teachers.

I wanted to find out if a particular technique, the process of LC would influence student teachers' and mentors' interactions in a positive way and create more equity of the experience of school practice among these student teachers. The knowledge which I had gained from my reading and my reflection during my study, combined with my own experience with the LC which I planned, processed and evaluated with my critical friend, Anna, had convinced me that both student teachers, teachers/mentors and me, a teacher educator, would all benefit from this alternative practice experience.

4.1.1 What could be learnt from the processing of the LC?

I imagined that the intervention of the LC would create a common focus for all the stakeholders involved. Consequently I assumed that this activity would improve the student-mentor relationship and create more equal conditions for students in their school-based practice. I also assumed that because I had prepared this intervention in collaboration with my critical friend

Anna, it would establish a more professional platform for the whole triangle of student teachers, mentors and teacher educators. Thus it would provide me with a sense of having a more important place and a greater say in the preparation of my students' practice experience than in the previous situation where I felt alienated from this preparation and accordingly had to develop various more or less creative and successful strategies in order to make the best out of an unsatisfactory situation.

In carrying out the first AR cycle, I had constantly to ask myself the following research questions:

1. What effects would an alternative teaching and learning practice, based on Self-Organised Learning and the process of LCs have on the professional and personal development of a group of student teachers?
    a. Would the student teachers be able to assume greater control over their personal development?
    b. Would the student teachers be able by means of this approach to find their own strengths and weaknesses and thereby find their own authentic voice as teachers?
    c. What might be the barriers to mentors and student teachers in implementing this alternative approach in schools?

In this chapter I report both on the procedure and the outcome of the first action I carried out with the purpose of improving school practice. It traces the cyclical nature of the various stages of action research, planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

4.2 What does it take to change minds?

In one of my interviews with a student teacher about her/his experience of teacher education, s/he claimed that s/he found very little difference between the structure of the study, particularly ways of organising and carrying out the teaching and learning in the college and what s/he had

experienced in upper secondary school. This perspective conforms to the ideas and experiences of Hill (2000) who claims:

> …Most teachers are schooled not educated. Consequently most are not practiced at joining in thoughtful dialogue about substantive issues. Sadly, many appear disinclined towards it. Schooling has left its mark...
>
> (Hill, 2000: 50)

In my experience, this problem is not only a question of the level of interest among students, but also of the ability of teacher educators and mentors to inculcate reflective and critical thinking in students (Hillier, 2002). Korthagen (2001: xi) claims that the structure in which these educators work is often so limiting that nobody knows where to begin if they want to make a change.

Faced with this it would seem fundamental to begin by changing the mindset and actions of teacher educators. As someone who belongs to this particular group of professionals, I realised years ago, that acting in limited and predefined structures, was challenging me to be creative and innovative, and that most importantly I had to start with myself, as Gandhi once very wisely said: ‘You must be the change you want to see in the world’. This saying inspired a process of self-evaluation and personal change.

4.2.1 My own change process

In order to improve my practice, I realised that I had to try more to put my students and their needs at the centre of my work and try to devise more student-oriented teaching and learning activities. My first initiative was to include in my RE seminars a session of group discussions followed by a plenary.

My ideas here were inspired by Arneberg and Øverland (1997) from whose work I took some relevant discussion themes. The one that turned out to be the most successful was the following: 'Why do you want to become and be a teacher?' Student teachers first discussed this theme in small groups, and then they shared their ideas in a plenary session. Even though these students were nearly halfway through the ITE programme, they claimed that this was the first time that they had been able to discuss this essential question as a classroom activity. They expressed a high degree of satisfaction in being challenged to discuss it both in small groups and in plenary. By reflecting upon this why-question, future teachers are given a chance to reflect critically upon their inner mission, (see Fig.2.1, 2.2.and 2.3), of becoming and being a teacher, on their values and beliefs and on the communication of these in their practice. In group discussions they are challenged to talk about it with others in order to come to terms with the dichotomy which seems to exist between values and beliefs and actions (Whitehead, 1999).

I would argue that this kind of activity is crucial for personal and professional development as a teacher and could enhance the ability to respond better to learners' needs.
Without such experiences there is a risk that future teachers are not fully prepared for the realities of classroom interactions and are not adequately informed about ways of creating good and constructive relationships with learners.

4.2.2 Examples of teachers' inabilities to understand children and own motives

Having visited more than 100 elementary classrooms over more than a decade in Australia, Hill has witnessed innumerable interactions between teachers and children. She claims that often 'the teacher appears not to have grasped the meaning or consequence of a child's intellectual

offering' (Hill, 2000: 50). This failure implies that the particular opportunity to engage the child in further learning is lost. Teachers are probably stuck in their own ideas and predefined answers and are therefore unable to be open and react to new ideas which children create in classroom interactions. How can this situation be remedied? According to Schulman (2002), controlling people and objects requires knowing how they work and what motivates them (Schulman, 2002: 321). This author also argues that in order to control oneself one needs anticipatory awareness of what one is inclined or about to do. At this point of my study I assumed that the PSO process of LC focusing on a specific, personal, self-determined learning task could promote this kind of knowledge which I deemed of great importance for teaching and learning. Empowered by own SOL experience and insight, teachers might be more open to children's new ideas in various educational settings.

4.2.3 Being open to new experiences and personal development

Csikszentmihaly (1996) talks about the need to be open to new experiences. He defines this human openness as: 'a fluid attention that constantly processes events in the environment and a great advantage for recognising potential novelty' (Csikszentmihaly, 1996: 53). I would argue that by promoting personal development and growth among future teachers, this particular openness can grow. I base this argument on a research project conducted by Vittersø (1998) called 'Happy people and wonderful experience', in which he claims that there is a clear connection between personal development and openness.

He identifies the following six characteristics which are manifested in people who wish to develop and grow as persons:

1. a rich imagination
2. an aesthetic sensitivity
3. a knowledge about and understanding of personal feelings

4. a need for a variety of personal action patterns
5. intellectual curiosity
6. tolerance

(Vittersø, 1998: 52)

As a teacher educator, I believe that I am in a position where I could stimulate this personal development and openness among my students. Drawing upon the rich content of the RE programme I found Vittersø's six points highly relevant to my critical reflection and creativity in this subject. My challenge seemed to be to devise and implement effective tools by which my students could become willing to grow and develop as persons, in order to fulfil their human potential.

I also found that Hill's point, that teacher education fails to educate teachers to engage with children intellectually, corresponds to what I have observed in numerous classroom observations during my fourteen years of experience as a teacher educator. Accordingly, I found that I should introduce student teachers to alternative ways of learning by implementing and monitoring an innovative process of change. In this process they are challenged to explore their personal strengths and weaknesses. Brudal (2006) identifies four aspects of this introspective process:

1. a wish to fulfil one's potential
2. a struggle to get to know oneself
3. reflection on personal values and purposes
4. realising one's personal potential in a creative process

(Brudal, 2006: 67, my translation)

She claims that creative human processes are activities which all individuals can take part in and develop by themselves. The challenge is to construct frameworks and appropriate tools for these creative processes to be initiated and monitored. At this point of my inquiry, I realised that in my

particular context of teacher education, which offers a limited framework, I needed to explore creative and effective tools for this process and was happy to be introduced to the LC procedure which I anticipated would be a fruitful way forward.

4.3 The Learning Conversation - a change instrument

In order to initiate a process of change, I used the SOL/LC techniques created by Harri-Augstein and Thomas, (1991). As the LC formula was taken from the English version designed by Harri-Augstein and Wells (1997) and developed by Timmins (1985) it had to be translated into Norwegian. But since English and Norwegian are two distinctively different languages, I had to find out how the various steps in the LC process could be translated in order to avoid misunderstandings and confusions in compiling and processing it (see Appendices 2a-b and 3a-b).

Reflecting upon my purpose in implementing the Learning Conversation, I anticipated that there was a need to assess its effectiveness in promoting autonomy and self-reflection and challenging student teachers and mentors to engage in the kind of introspective process which is described by Brudal above.

This process is derived from positive psychology and is based on the assumption that human beings have the capacity to seek and achieve personal growth and integrity.

Three basic needs must, however, be met in order to promote this process:

1. The need for autonomy
2. The need for competencies and skills
3. The need for a close and trusting relationship to others

(Brudal, 2006: 56)

Considering the limited structure and framework of the RE programme, I believed that the procedure of LC could be an efficient tool for initiating a process in which these needs could be met.

4.4 The LC - a means to develop autonomy and self-reflection

Personal autonomy, self-regulation and self-reflection are essential goals in the LC process. The process starts with a discussion in which the learner (student teacher) and the coach (mentor) define and write down the learning task according to the personal needs of the learner. Thus the element of autonomy is present from the very start of the process. In order to make a good choice here, knowledge and reflection about one's own potential and possibilities of growth and change have to be considered. In the particular context of teacher education, these choices will be based on previous teaching experience, personal knowledge of and evaluation of success and shortcomings in this particular field of work. Student teachers in their second year of teacher education will have reports from three previous school practice periods in which their mentors have given their assessments based on observations of individual performances in the classroom. Thus they are supposedly in a good position to talk about their needs by the help of a mentor. In the LC process the mentor could then help the student to talk about appropriate strategies and how s/he can evaluate the result, encouraging self-reflection and awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses.

The validity of my claim here was tested in LC training courses in which students in plenaries shared their learning tasks. Many of them argued that their practice reports had helped them to choose appropriate learning tasks. This issue is taken further in 4.5.1.

4.4.1 The importance of self-reflective knowledge

According to Habermas (1979) self-reflective knowledge is linked to the human desire for freedom. By investigating our own experiences through reflection, we can better understand the social, political and cultural forces which have shaped our responses. Thus we may make more considered choices about the ways in which we choose to be and act in the world (Toohey, 1999: 146). This kind of self-reflective knowledge is important for teachers for it might produce a commitment to action. As the profession of teaching involves a high degree of human interactions, it is extremely important that teachers, who are responsible for the quality of these interactions with such vulnerable individuals as children and young people, develop a high degree of self-reflection in which they are able to identify their own values, attitudes and beliefs which underlie their reactions and actions. I anticipated that in the interactions between student teachers and mentors, the use of LC would promote this important process of self-reaction.

4.5 Preparing the LC intervention

The techniques of applying the LC were introduced to mentors and students in a workshop, arranged for this particular purpose. This workshop took place at BUC in January 2003, followed by the first AR cycle. This workshop was created as a co-operative project between my critical friend, Anna, Dr. Paul Timmins, my supervisor, and me as an action researcher.

As previously noted, in each student group there are 7 mentors. Each mentor receives in their schools a group of 2-4 student teachers at a time in two practice periods of 2-4 weeks during the study year. Before these practice periods take place, student teachers, mentors and teacher educators meet in preparatory seminars to prepare this school-based practice experience. During

the practice period teacher educators visit these practice schools to observe their students' performances in the classroom. Normally they spend one day in each school.

My initial idea was to train all mentors and student teachers together in the procedures of LC. The ideal framework would have been to create groups of mentors and student teachers for a trial run of the procedure. Unfortunately, only three students turned up and attended the introductory SOL/LC workshop. As there is no compulsory attendance at courses in the college, as previously mentioned student teachers tend to be very selective in their choice of seminars and courses to take part in. In addition, in this case, many of them may have been reluctant to participate in a workshop where the language was English, as I learnt from some of the student teachers after the workshop had taken place.

The LC workshop was attended by 26 people, and included some teacher educators, teachers/mentors and head teachers. As the evaluations of the LC experience given by 12 of them were quite positive in relation to the potential of SOL and LC as a tool in mentoring and the 7 mentors for my group of student teachers agreed to process this conversation with their students; I was encouraged to go on with the implementation of LC.
In this process the mentors would take on the role of the learning coach and guide the student teachers through the process.

4.5.1 Challenges in processing the Learning Conversation

The task of the LC coach (mentor) is to ask helpful and relevant questions aiming at stimulating reflection about appropriate self-determined learning tasks and to define and decide about purposes, strategies and outcomes associated with these tasks. In order to act as a good coach,

one needs some experience both as coach and learner so as to internalise this PSO process and to facilitate it with others.

Because so few of the student teachers took part in the workshop, I had to introduce the procedure to the whole group of 25 student teachers. This was done as part of a seminar where they acted out the various roles of LC as learners, coaches and observers of which the latter has the task of observing the interactions between the learner and the learning coach and keep an accurate record of them.

The first challenge in this activity is to choose an appropriate learning task. I observed that these students very easily found good learning tasks and seemed to have a clear picture of themselves in classroom interactions. In a plenary session, they shared their views about this and many of them said that the activity had caused them to review in their minds the remarks and commentaries given by their mentors during their last practice period. Some of them said that the written report from the mentor had inspired them to find good and appropriate learning tasks. This experience convinced me that my students had sufficient self-insight to choose appropriate learning tasks with the purpose of personal development and growth.

4.5.2 The first implementation of SOL and LC

As the programme of ITE is highly structured and offers few possibilities for student teachers to participate in extracurricular activities, the intervention of LC had to be implemented as an integral part of the programme at a point where it could serve a predefined purpose in a context already existing. The only possibility I found of implementing it was in student teacher-mentor interactions, where conversations about classroom performances are compulsory.

Even though the 7 mentors of my group of students participated in the SOL/LC workshop, a meeting was needed to discuss the intervention with them. I prepared this session with my critical friend, Anna, who was a member of this mentoring team. The purpose of this meeting was to share our experience of the LC process and discuss how it could be used in student-teacher/mentor interactions.

My information about the success of LC or the reverse was based on the visits which I carried out to all the seven schools where my students were carrying out their practice. When I found out that LC had been successfully implemented in two of these schools, I revisited these schools to observe my students and discuss their experience with both them and their mentors.
There was no need to revisit the schools where the LC procedure had failed, due to lack of experience with this tool, a reason given by the 5 mentors who had not used the LC.
After the practice period of three weeks, I interviewed the seven student teachers and the two mentors who had successfully carried out the experiment. All of these students had done the LCs one to one in tutorial conversations with their mentors.

4.6 Data from students and analysis of their written LC formulas

4.6.1 Introduction

When I visited the seven student teachers in their school practice they gave me their written LC formulas which they had complied in the LC process with their mentors and all of them agreed to let me use them in my study. During these visits I also interviewed the student teachers about their LC experience by asking the following questions:

IQ 1: How did you use LC with your mentor?

IQ 2: Were you able to fill in all the boxes in the formula?

The 7 student teachers told me that the LC conversations - for all of them - took place at the beginning and at the end of the practice period. All of them, except one, were able to fill in all the boxes of the format. The one, whose format was incomplete, left out the last part, which was about significant differences between what had been planned and what was done. Because of the small sample of data, 7 written LC formulas, I analysed them manually with the purpose of detecting common concerns which might indicate patterns of experience and reflection. The presentation of the findings follows the frequency of recurrent themes, 4.6.2 - 4.6.6 present these themes.

4.6.2 The challenge of classroom management

In reviewing the formats, the most common theme was classroom management since three out of seven respondents chose this theme as their learning task. The question was how they should face this task; what strategy did they want to employ in order to become better at managing a class or groups of learners. All of them mentioned the importance of being well prepared for the lessons. One underlined the ability to develop a high level of self-awareness and constantly ask him/herself how fairly pupils are being treated, not being too strict or too mild. S/he also mentioned the need to prepare for any situation that might occur in the classroom during lessons, to develop a flexible attitude in which it felt comfortable to depart from the predefined lesson schedules.

Another student teacher mentioned the challenge of being very clear and structured in the giving of instructions and explanations of teaching and learning activities. For her/him there was a fear of intervening in negative interactions between pupils. S/he wanted to overcome this fear and develop the necessary courage to intervene as a good leader of classroom work. Two of these

student teachers underlined the importance of being fair and treating everybody with the same level of respect and attention.

4.6.3 Evaluation of personal success

The way in which these student teachers wanted to evaluate their success was very similar. All of them relied on their own feelings and self-judgement in addition to feedback from peers and mentors. They also wanted to ask pupils about their work as teachers and gather what impression these pupils had of their skills and competencies as teachers.

4.6.4 The challenge of being well prepared

It is difficult for a young trainee with a limited experience of teaching to judge how well s/he knows a particular subject area and to devise appropriate ways of work for a particular age-group. Two of the four respondents in the group in the other school wanted to focus on this challenge as their particular learning task. The strategies which they chose are quite interesting and worth specifying. Student teacher A, wanted to start with a discussion with his/her mentor and reassure him/herself about the state of his/her personal knowledge. Then the structure of the lesson had to be planned meticulously, step by step.

Even if the prepared plan were not implemented fully, this student teacher considered that this preparation provided a feeling of security which s/he needed as a basis for teaching and acting as a teacher.

The other student teacher (B), proposed to spend a lot of time studying the subject in question, memorising important parts and then by means of various role-plays try to act out the lesson at home. This activity was chosen because it posed the challenge of being aware of her/his body language and helped in trying to imagine how pupils would react and interact with him/her. Like

the previous group of respondents these two student teachers wanted to evaluate their work through their own feelings of success or lack of it and by discussions with peers and mentors.

4.6.5 The challenge of pedagogies

One student is particularly interested in the teaching of English and RE and wanted to develop her/himself as a good storyteller. The two subjects are highly appropriate for gaining experience in this particular learning task. In order to gain experience, the planning of the practice period had to be discussed with her/his peers for their permission to carry out this interdisciplinary work. There was also a need to agree on a suitable time for rehearsal with and feedback from these peers. Since these kinds of activities have been part of the teaching and learning activities in the RE module in the college, the student teacher wanted me as his/her RE teacher educator to be present in the classroom to observe the performance in an authentic setting. Then the evaluation discussion could follow in a plenary session with peers, mentor and teacher educator.

4.6.6 The challenge of cohesion and conflict-solving in a lesson

The challenge of creating cohesion in a lesson and solving the tension and conflicts which might occur between the children in class was the learning task chosen by the last student. The topics are not logically connected but the strategies proposed by this respondent indicated that a lack of cohesion and structure in a lesson might create confusion, tension and at worst conflict in the classroom.

The strategies which this student teacher outlined are the challenges of expressing oneself clearly and developing a genuine and personal way of gaining and holding the attention of pupils. S/he also wanted to promote her/himself in an active way, keep a calm atmosphere, be a good listener and develop and demonstrate an attitude of understanding each pupil and doing her/his best to attune to learners’ individual needs.

4.7 Revision of the learning process

Among the seven respondents, three stated that they were able to keep to the original learning tasks. Hence, there was no need for further explanation or analysing any differences before and after the experience of the learning task. The four others gave an explanation of their learning tasks in greater depth. Three of these had chosen classroom management as their main task and they elaborated on this particular theme. Two of them wanted by adopting a more directional teaching style to become a strong leader 'in control' in such a way that everybody knows how to act in the classroom. The third one mentioned the power of using the voice effectively, never shouting but treating learners politely and demonstrating a high degree of respect. This student teacher was convinced that this behaviour would make pupils attentive and respectful in their behaviour. S/he claimed that if the teachers shout and are rude, pupils will turn away from them and become rude themselves.

4.7.1 Which actions were implemented?

All the respondents who planned to be well prepared for the lessons felt that they had managed to fulfil this intention. In addition, the challenge of relating well to all learners is shared by those who wanted to improve their power to do this. The student teacher who wanted to have the courage to intervene in actions which were undesirable in the classroom, was happy to experience that s/he he was more confident in doing so. S/he admitted, however, that having intervened, s/he 'didn't know what to do next' and wanted help from her/his mentor and peers.

4.7.2 The question of professional/personal development

The student teacher who puts a good deal of emphasis on specific personal development, admitted that it was very difficult to do what s/he wanted to do because the situations in which s/he was most likely to promote her/himself more clearly did not arise. S/he felt, however, that

the fact that s/he had become more reflective about her/his own behaviour, including body language, eye contact and her/his way of speaking, particularly the speed and pitch of her/his voice, supplied more confidence for the development of her/his personal teaching style.

The student teacher who wanted to develop his/her personal competence as a storyteller in RE was happy to find some very good texts appropriated for learning by heart from Norwegian Church History, to retell in her/his own way. The success of this experience confirmed her/his talent as a storyteller and motivated her/him to develop further along these lines.

4.7.3 Evaluating the outcomes of the learning tasks

Two of the respondents shared the feeling of doing their best considering the circumstances.

Both of them would have liked to do better, or as one of them states: ‘I would like to be able to put more spice into my teaching’. Another student teacher was very satisfied with her/his behaviour in the classroom as a result of reflecting at length upon how to interact with pupils and experiencing in an authentic setting that s/he had been able to act as intended.

Four student teachers revealed a high degree of satisfaction because they all felt more competent having managed to perform better in the classroom. They felt that this particular practice period confirmed their personal skills and ability to become and be a teacher. Three of them mentioned the impact of positive feedback from the mentor and peers as essential reasons for their feeling of success.

In the descriptions of the differences connected to the evaluation of outcomes only two respondents answered. One wanted more feedback from the mentor. His/her own feeling of success combined with the feedback given by mentor and peers did not fully satisfy his/her need to know more about her/his personal performance. S/he wanted comments on the language used;

body language, behaviour, and interactions with pupils to be more concrete and specific. According to this student teacher's views, more concrete and specific feedback would influence her/his choices of strategies with more focus on personal development.

I found this commentary important as I inferred that because of the call for autonomy and self-organisation in determining the PSO, the learner was prepared for detailed feedback and actually wanted the coach to be concrete and specific in evaluating classroom performances.

4.8 Reviewing the LC: analysis of student strengths and weaknesses

The main purpose of reviewing the learning process in a discussion with the mentor is to be able to define and articulate personal strengths and weaknesses. In order to do so, the mentor who acts as the learning coach has to be supportive and patient and give the learner, the trainee, sufficient time to reflect and find his/her own answers. Since the cohort of respondents limited to seven (R1-R7), the report will present all the answers in the following table:

Respondents	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
R1	Able to establish good relationships, can show empathy.	Fear of making mistakes, I lack self-confidence.
R2	Consistent in interactions with pupils, able to analyse own performance.	Too concerned about shortcomings.
R3	High degree of self-insight, I easily find areas for improvements, engaged and observant of pupils' needs.	Sometimes I lose my confidence for minor reasons and then I make a fool of myself due to a lack of critical reflection.
R4	Patience	Too shy to show who I am.
R5	I am able to see all pupils and to communicate well with them.	I have to promote myself more clearly.
R6	I have a lot of self-confidence and I have the ability to bring people together. I feel that I am good at motivating learners to work. I am	Would like to master the teaching of English better. I am not quite sure how able I am to maintain learners' motivation and interest. I

	a good storyteller, curious to try new approaches.	would like to improve my pedagogies in helping pupils to tell stories.
R7	Engaged and easy to be motivated to work. Open towards new pedagogies. Can adjust to constructive advice.	When facing a new situation, I feel a lack of self-confidence and then I withdraw myself too soon.

Table 4-1: Table of strengths and weaknesses described by the seven respondents

4.8.1 Lack of self-confidence - a typical weakness

In analysing this table the question of self-confidence appears as a recurrent theme among the answers. Most of the respondents mention their lack of self-confidence and the awareness of shortcomings. This is quite natural, considering that these student teachers do not have much experience in teaching, but it is also a challenge for teacher educators and mentors in preparing student teachers for the realities of the classroom.

Self-confidence will gradually develop along with the experience of daily school work and the possibility of detecting and reflecting upon shortcomings and the feeling of not coping. From these experiences, ideas for new actions which might remedy such situations will emerge. It is important to create a framework where discussions can take place about these important themes for student teachers. From the feedback they gave based on the LC experience, I concluded that this tool offered such a framework.

When it comes to the opposite of this quality namely ‘a lot of self-confidence’ only one respondent, R6, owned to possessing this.

Both the strengths and weaknesses mentioned in these responses show a high degree of maturity among these student teachers. The strengths are all related to human relationships and interactions and these trainees have considered the given priority to the quality of teacher-learner interactions.

In this context there is a concern about their personal ability to assert themselves clearly and achieve sufficient security to ‘show who I am’, to cite R4.

4.9 Interviews with trainees about the LC experience

The particular interest for me in the present study was to examine the effect of the LC and find out whether the learners and learning coaches considered this tool to be effective as a means for improving interactions and relationship with mentors and fellow trainees.

After the school practice period I carried out my research interviews with the 7 student teachers and the 2 mentors. I asked the following 4 questions to the student teachers:

IQ 1: Could you tell me about your LC experience?

IQ 2: Were you able to find and talk about your strengths and weaknesses?

IQ 3: Did LC influence the relationship in the practice group?

IQ 4: How do you evaluate the support of your mentor/learning coach?

In the following I report on these questions.

4.9.1 The views of student teachers about the experience of LC

All the trainees expressed a positive view of the LC experience. I was particularly interested in understanding more precisely what they found positive in LC and why. Here are some of the arguments:

> …The LC procedure was good because it forced me to think and reflect upon purpose, strategy and possible outcomes of my practice period. I would like to go on using it in my next school practice… (S1)

This positive experience with LC is shared by another student teacher who outlined the experience of it in this way:

> …The benefit of LC was that we had to write down concrete PSO. Thus we committed ourselves to be structured in our work and constantly analyse it in the light of what we had agreed upon. The discussions with the mentor were as a result well prepared and we could both focus on the purpose and analyse how well the strategies worked in terms of fulfilling their purpose. My feeling of cohesion improved. The mentor helped me a lot in this process and so did my peers. I think the reason was that everybody knew the purposes of the other, something which made the observations more focused and the follow-up discussion more constructive. The feeling of security these constructive interactions produced made me more competent in my role as a teacher. I felt this strongly when I had to tackle tensions and conflicts that arose in the classroom… (S2)

The experience of being more focused and structured in the classroom because of LC was shared by another student teacher (S3) who underlined how important it is to have a limited number of purposes to focus on:

> …My self-confidence increased because of the structured way we worked. You could concentrate on a few goals, decide how to work to reach particular learning outcomes and then evaluate your success. It gave me a feeling of improving my reflection and skills, step by step… (S3)

These two student teachers, S2 and S3, worked with the mentor who had taken part in the process of gaining experience with LC and accordingly was the one who was best prepared for

applying it. The inspiration and support of the mentor seem to be of importance for the success of the approach, as explained by this student teacher:

> …In the beginning I was quite reserved and not very eager to use LC, but the mentor motivated me and in the process of compiling and implementing it, I got more interested and was surprised how well it worked… (S4)

From this argument it could be indicated that for the best possible result of implementing LC, training and experience seem vital, particularly for mentors, who have to monitor the process and guide learners through the procedure. Lack of skills or personal abilities to do this in a good way seem to influence the success of the LC process.

4.10 The question of personal strengths and weaknesses

As already discussed above, LC inspires reflection about personal strengths and weaknesses. In the interviews, interviewees explain how this technique helped them to understand themselves better and how, by getting a better picture of their own potential talents, they could work in a more focused way on developing the strong sides of their personality and improving the weak sides. This process was described by one of the interviewees in the following way:

> …The LC process made me become more aware of my weak sides and how I could improve them. It also provided me with more confidence in using more of my strong sides… (S4)

Knowing how difficult it can be to describe strong sides, the following conversation that took place between the researcher (R) and one student teacher, whom I will call Lise may clarify the problem:

R: Did you find your strong sides?

Lise: Yes, I realised that I could use more of my natural disposition, really show who I am in the classroom and not act in a role, the role of a teacher.

R: Is it important for you to show who you are?

Lise: Yes, definitely because it is impossible to hide your identity or your temperament. Being who you are promotes confidence and then you don't have to copy somebody or act out a role.

R: How easy or difficult was it for you to talk about your strong and weak sides?

Lise: In the beginning I found it difficult to describe my strengths and weaknesses because I am not used to thinking in these categories. For me it was a question of time. I really needed some time to reflect upon this and find my answers in an independent way. I am happy that my mentor gave me this necessary time…

The relevance of SOL/LC techniques for increased self-knowledge and personal development seem to be felt among these interviewees. S7 puts it this way:

> …By using LC I discovered something very important for my development as a teacher. I am a person who likes to get a lot of work done during a lesson. This is all right but the condition is that the learners are ready to continue and engage in the next task you propose. You have to have all pupils with you before you go from one activity to another. I felt that I became a better observer in detecting the needs of my pupils. I regret not having the support of LC in my previous school practice. Then I would have been able to see this problem and could have done something to remedy it earlier… (S7)

For this respondent the LC is experienced as a purposeful activity for a critical reflection on classroom interactions.

4.11 The impact of LC on the relationship in the practice group

The trainees taking part in the LC experiment worked in groups of three or four led by the mentor. Using LC as a guideline for their shared work seemed to bring more openness and concern to the interactions between participants. In this trustful atmosphere where they could share learning tasks and strategies of work, competence in constructive observation and the courage in making relevant comments could develop. Trainees considered this experience to be useful for their personal development and a valuable support in the process of growing as a teacher, as expressed in the following way by S4:

> …I was very pleased with the support I got from my peers. All the four of us shared our learning tasks, purposes and strategies of work. Then each of us could focus particularly on the task which the actual person wanted to have observed while acting in the classroom. It is not very easy to receive critical feedback and discuss personal weaknesses. However, when this was the case for everybody, and the purpose was to help you improve yourself, you accept it in a more positive manner… (S4)

Several participants value the promotion of openness and trust in interactions caused by LC as another trainee described it:

> …LC promoted good co-operation and openness in our group. Because areas for improvement were described and discussed openly, everybody knew what the person who was acting as a teacher would like us to focus on and then we were more apt to give relevant and constructive commentaries and feedback… (S2)

For S2 as for S4, reported in 4.9.1, the support of the mentor was of great importance in the LC process.

4.12 The support of the learning coach, the mentor

The support of the mentor based on sufficient competence and experience in applying the LC technique seems to be of great importance for the feeling of success among trainees.

The seven students who successfully implemented LC all mentioned the valuable support from the mentor. One trainee puts it like this:

> …The most valuable experience for me with the use of LC was that everything was prepared in advance. My mentor and the other peers were all fully informed about my purpose and strategies. This entailed a constructive discussion after the lesson. When you are focused on a particular topic, known to everybody, you are more open to negative commentaries because you know that they all want you to improve and advance in your personal development… (S4)

Considering the fact that these trainees are in the process of becoming professional teachers, it is possible that the support of LC as a tool to guide them step by step in this development might create a community of learning where professional and personal development and growth can take place more constructively than without its support.

4.13 Perspectives from my critical friend

I discussed these findings with my critical friend, Anna. We were particularly interested in discussing how and when it could be most effective to implement the LC procedure in student

teacher-mentor interactions. Anna assumed that in the first year of the practice period simply being in a school and adapting to classroom work is a good deal to ask of a student. Consequently it could be too early to be introduced to the LC process. She would, however, present the format at the end of this period and ask student teachers to be prepared to process it in the next practice period.

Then she would recommend this tool for use in all other school-based practice periods. This view was endorsed by a student who took part in this first LC intervention.
After her next practice period, I had an informal conversation with her/him. S/he told me that s/he had expected to continue using the LC in her third year of school-based practice. In this practice period, however, s/he was sent to a school where there was no knowledge about this tool and her mentor was quite inexperienced. S/he was very disappointed by this experience and told me that she had expected her professional and personal development as a teacher to be an ongoing process where the various steps were closely linked with every new step which diverged from the previous ones.

Reflecting upon this conversation and discussing it with Anna we agreed that
LC had created a new and coherent procedure which could meet the needs which this student teacher had expressed and that once implemented it had to be taken further.

4.14 The LC experience from the perspective of mentors

4.14.1 Introduction

In my first LC intervention study I interviewed seven mentors. Only two, however, felt that they had sufficient insight and skills in processing LC to apply this technique with trainees constructively during their three weeks practice period.

The interviews conducted with five of them were accordingly restricted to a general conversation about the student teachers' performances, challenges and problems in their teaching and learning activities in the classroom. These conversations did not generate any new insight or knowledge about the application of LC. Only two mentors had successfully made use of the LC conversation procedure with their students and were therefore able to share their experiences with me. Both of them had attended the SOL workshop and had much experience as mentors. Thus they had the courage to apply LC and shared the wish to improve themselves as mentors, in particular to increase their competence as counsellor and coach. Thus I was left with two interviews which could inform my study from the perspectives of mentors and their specific LC experience.

4.14.2 Interview schedule with mentors

In order to explore the experience of the mentors I devised the following interview schedule:

IQ 1: How did you use LC?

IQ 2: Which challenges did you face as a coach?

IQ 3: What do you think about LC as a tool for student teacher-mentor interactions?

I will report my findings according to these questions.

4.14.3 How was LC used?

In processing the LC the mentors acted as learning coaches whose main challenge was to support the learner in constructing meaningful learning tasks and finding appropriate strategies to attain the intended purposes. The question of how these two learning coaches or mentors organised LC may be of interest for the study at this point.

Both of them used LC at the beginning of the practice period in individual conversations with each trainee and then they organised the second conversation at the end of the practice period. I shall call these mentors (A) and (B).

Mentor (A) explained her use of LC as follows:

> …I used LC with each student to talk about their general purpose for the practice period and the appropriate strategies to fulfil these aims. We also talked about their strong and weak sides as I knew these students already from the previous practice period. Our common concern was to focus on possible outcomes, how they envisaged the results of their acts. By the end of the period we had a review where we went through what they really wanted to do and what they had done so we could detect possible differences… (MA)

Mentor (B) had a longer explanation as s/he included her/his motivation for implementing LC:

> …I got the courage to implement LC with trainees from the competence I achieved by attending the SOL/LC workshop. When the four trainees arrived at my school I showed them the LC format and explained that this was the tool I intended to use for our work. I described my plan of using the LC for a one-hour conversation with each student. The challenge for them was to find their particular learning task and reflect upon the strategies

> to follow. I spent a lot of time with them on deciding the main focus of the learning task, purpose, strategies and possible outcome. At the end of each conversation we made an appointment for the following conversation. In this group they knew each other well enough to feel confident in sharing their purposes, strategies and possible outcomes. This was very helpful for making the observation and for the feedback to be constructive... (MB)

Because I had already interviewed these four trainees before interviewing the mentor, I could relate this to their views and get the reaction from their mentor on particular issues. One of these issues was the fact that before they started there was not much enthusiasm in the group for processing the LC. Here is the commentary from the mentor on this issue:

> …The trainees told me that they were not very positive about the idea of implementing LC, but gradually they experienced that this was a very good way of developing their self-reflection and it gave them a feeling of continuous development. They felt that they had entered an ongoing process that made them stronger in coping with the challenges of becoming a good teacher… (MB)

4.15 Challenges of being a learning coach

The particular challenge of acting as a coach for an experienced mentor was commented upon in this way:

> …I found the task of the coach difficult in the beginning. It had to do with my ability to ask the good questions that could advance the reflection of the trainee and push the conversation forward creatively. I think this is a matter of experience and has to do with sufficient practice of LC. It is also connected to the

> learning task, because some are obviously easier to talk about than others. My main concern was to make the trainees understand that their ideas and reflections were the most important, that my ideas were inferior to theirs. I underlined the challenge to develop autonomy even if they used me as a role model, they could only be themselves, four different individuals, and consequently show four different ways of being a teacher. The LC process made the trainees more reflective about this particular, personal development… (MA)

4.16 Perspectives on LC: A tool for reflection

The experience of the LC as a tool for becoming more reflective is shared by mentor (B) who argues:

> …I felt that in processing LC I became more reflective and I certainly saw that the student teachers became more reflective too. The LC process produced more self-insight which made them more aware of how they could develop their personal potential as a teacher. I found that they became more confident in expressing their own wishes, what they wanted to do and could discuss more accurately their aims and the meaning of their actions… (MB)

There seems to be a connection between reflective practice and authentic experiences in one's personal development as a teacher. LC could create a zone of proximal development, (ZPD) (Miller, 2003), involving personal development for both coach and learner. The quality of the personal relationship between coach and learner plays a vital part in the outcome of the interactions taking place. Mentor (B) explained this in some detail:

> …I know that I'm a person who talks a lot and my problem is that in a counselling situation I come up with the answer too easily and too fast without giving the learner enough time to reflect and find his/her own answers. Knowing that LC is based on SOL, I was forced to become more laid back, give more time for the learner to find his/her answer. When I managed to give the initiative to the learners and they eventually came up with their solutions and answers, I observed that there was a great feeling of satisfaction among them… (MB)

4.16.1 Did student teachers share this experience?

In my interviews with the student teachers who took part in this activity, they told me that in these conversations, particularly because of the attitude and supportive influence of the mentor, they were able to talk about their inner thoughts and feelings and verbalise ideas which they had never expressed before. This was obviously a profound experience for the trainees as one of them said:

> …Being able to talk about my inner feelings with a supportive and empathic mentor was like a personal victory, as a quantum leap in my personal development as a teacher… (S3)

The mentor commented on this in the following way:

> …The way we used LC created an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. This was most exposed when talking about strengths and weaknesses. This is actually very difficult, particularly to put your strength into words. I gave the trainees a whole week to reflect upon this. They were then committed to reflecting upon this and finding their answers. In the last LC everybody talked positively about this commitment. I think it

> has to do with a feeling of transference to a higher level of self-insight. A personal transformation takes place… (MB)

As this transformative aspect of LC is important for the study of personal development in ITE, the question of if and how these mentors would advance the development of LC was of relevance for future work.

4.17 Further use of the LC

The question of the further use of the LC in mentor-trainee interactions was raised by me and answered by the two mentors in the following way:

> …In my future work I will develop my LC competence. Previously my counselling of trainees has been before and after a teaching activity. The value of LC is that it gives you an overview, a kind of mirror or frame from where you can analyse what you are doing. It can guide you more specifically in your personal development in becoming and being a teacher. Knowledge is of course very important for a teacher, but if you don't know how you can relate well to learners and how you ought to talk to them, your knowledge has no value… (MB)

The same question of the continuous use of LC was put to mentor A, and was answered in this way:

> …I would definitely go on implementing LC because it creates a constructive relationship between mentor and trainees. It is very suitable for our purposes in trainees' practice experience. It is very structured and you can focus on a limited, but central purpose of our activities. According to my views and experiences, personal development can most efficiently take

> place by concentrating on a limited number of aims. In-depth development of one side of your personality will influence other sides of your personality; in fact it will influence you as a person and a future teacher… (MB)

The positive feedback from these mentors inspired me to go on to the second implementation of the learning conversation with a new cohort of students and mentors after a necessary revision of the format, particularly a revision of the language used in the instructions of the format.

4.18 Revision of the LC format

The mentors who had successfully tried out the LC procedure and wanted to go on using it with future trainees came up with constructive ideas for revising the format, particularly the wording of the instructions. Both of them mentioned how the language had to be more specific for the purpose of avoiding any misunderstandings of what the trainees had to do. Mentor (B) underlined the need to try out LC several times. She would introduce this procedure to trainees in their first practice period and challenge them to start thinking in these categories as early as possible. The best approach would be to start using the LC technique from the first year of ITE and continue using it for all periods of practice. This implies training in the LC techniques for the whole body of mentors. (Appendices 2 a-b and 3 a-b are two versions of the LC format. 3 a-b are the revised versions of 2a-b).

4.19 The LC and RE from the perspective of trainees

The relevance of LC for personal development and transformation was explored in the experience of mentors and trainees in this first LC intervention. In particular the experience of mentor (B) as not only an experienced teacher and mentor, but also as an experienced counsellor,

is of importance for the study. The main concern of my enquiry about personal development through the chosen subject of RE was addressed in the interviews with the seven trainees. My assumption as a researcher was that inspiring reflection and self-knowledge among future teacher paves the way for becoming a good RE teacher.

Accordingly, I had to ask these interviewees if they had detected any relevance between the general aims of the RE programme to promote personal development through the teaching of this subject and their own general growth and development as teachers.

4.19.1 Personal development through RE

Several trainees seemed to have been thinking a good deal about the challenge of promoting personal development through RE. Some of my respondents could construct very clear arguments about it. Here are some of them:

> …In order to be a good teacher I have to have a lot of knowledge and try to behave in a fair manner in the classroom. I want to focus on the learning environment, to develop a safe and agreeable community of learning. I think that I exercise a lot of empathy and want to use this ability to include learners with learning difficulties. Perhaps I will specialise in education for special needs. When it comes to RE, this subject is very important. Even if I consider myself to be a practising Christian, I think I can do a good job. My behaviour, values and attitudes are the most important things that I have to inspire my pupils to learn. I will never instruct, but by being a role model I'll try to promote Christian values and try to encourage learners to internalise the values of RE. Respect is very important for me. I want to respect all religions and worldviews and by showing respect towards all learners, I hope they will learn to respect each other… (S3)

This answer embodies the critical reflection of a practising Christian about the teaching and learning in RE. Since the core curricula of 1997 and 2003 state that 'the classroom is no place for the preaching of a particular faith', the issue about the difference between education and instruction is addressed critically in various ways in this subject.

Accordingly I needed to explore how my respondents dealt with this problem.

4.19.2 Teaching RE as a practising believer

The question of regarding the practice of a particular religion as an obstacle or an asset for an RE teacher varies. S3, quoted above, obviously sees this as an asset, while another trainee finds a reconciliation of the two somewhat difficult:

> …I think RE is a very good subject. My concern is my ability to be neutral, to treat all religions and worldviews equally. As a devout Christian, I find the teaching of Islam a challenge and I feel that the question of neutrality will be the most difficult one in the teaching of this religion. The reason is that I, as a Christian, find it problematic to support the identity of a Muslim child, and Muslim parents might show scepticism towards me. For me it is very important to be honest and be myself and at the same time open and not judgemental towards others… (S2)

Since RE is compulsory in Norway, the scepticism which this student teacher talks about is not only a problem for individual teachers; parents from minority groups in this country have questioned the whole construction of the subject. Hagesæther and Sandsmark (2006) have conducted an evaluation project of the new multi faith RE subject in a number of schools in Norway. They found great differences from one class to another in the way that teachers taught it (see 1.2.2).

4.20 How can LC promote personal development?

There seems to be a connection between the promotion of personal development by processing LC and being or becoming a teacher as one student expressed in this way:

> …Because of LC, a close relationship between mentor and trainees was established. During this particular practice period, my choice to become a teacher was confirmed. It was a period where I could most clearly see myself fulfilling the role of a teacher… (S4)

As I wanted the interviewee to be more specific at this point, I asked her/him: Can you be more specific about this experience? To which s/he replied:

> …Because it means the feeling of being able to teach pupils so they learn, have a good and open communication with them, create and inspire good attitudes. You are not supposed to instruct them but educate them and be a good leader of our mutual work… (S4)

R: Do you see yourself as a role model in this situation?

S: In this process of interactions, you become a role model and then you have to be a good one.

R: What is a good role model?

S: Someone who can create good communites of learning where learners can express their ideas and be motivated to learn. The most important message to convey is that you have to work gradually towards a goal, not necessarily being the best, but do your best.

4.20.1 The role of RE in schools

When I further explored this student teacher's experience with RE during her/his practice period, s/he gave the following answer to this question:

> …We were surprised how much knowledge pupils in grade four, [sc. about 9 years of age] had acquired. The topic was Islam and they talked about Ibrahim and Isaac and they knew the Christian stories about these patriarchs and were able to compare. RE is a very good subject because all pupils can participate regardless of academic abilities… (S4)

By the reform of 1997 and the implementation of the new multi-faith approach to RE, many teachers created new pedagogies, for example, pedagogies related to a narrative approach focusing on the main stories from various religions. Looking at these stories and retelling them in various ways, using many different methods seem to have promoted good teaching and learning in the RE classroom. This fact is reflected in the respondent's observation by stating that young learners at the age of 9 are able to compare various versions of stories coming from the same roots. Based on his/her classroom activities in RE, s/he sees the inclusive potential of this subject.

4.21 Conclusion

The purpose of this first action research cycle was to find out how suitable the Learning Conversation process as a particular pedagogical tool could be for establishing a good relationship between student teachers and their mentors and whether it could offer more equal conditions for student teacher in their school-based practices. I was particularly interested to

know more about the efficiency of this tool as a way of promoting personal development and growth among student teachers. I also assumed that this personal development would stimulate an awareness of and a manifestation of particular attitudes such as respect, tolerance and care which the RE curriculum advises as characteristics of teacher-learner interactions in the RE classroom and in the behaviour of the RE teacher. From this limited study with rather weak data, I found out that I could not draw any conclusion in relation to the questions mentioned above. However, it is possible to say that this first intervention of my enquiry revealed that a good framework of the skills of processing LC is obviously of basic importance if mentors are to have the courage to engage in this activity. Five of the chosen cohort of seven mentors felt too insecure to implement the procedure according to the scheme.

As mentors are the leaders of student teachers' practice work in schools, it is necessary to train mentors to be confident and experienced in processing the LC.
Significantly, the two experienced mentors/teachers who were able to make use of this pedagogical tool judged it to be so successful that they wanted to go on using it in the future. These mentors produced valuable ideas of how the procedure could be improved in terms of revising the instructions given in the format, and how the various steps of the processing could be determined in order to serve more constructively the interactions of student teachers and mentors and their mutual work.

This first study provided me with some insight into the difficulties of learners and learning coaches in processing the LC. In my reflection following this intervention, I concluded that teacher educators have an important role to play in the motivation and training sequence prior to the experiment. The motivation of student teachers to implement the LC as a tool in the field-

based experience for student teachers ought to start early in the RE programme and then followed it by an intensive preparation before the practice period. A successful implementation of LC supplies sufficient motivation and training in these techniques. Given an optimal framework, it seems to offer a constructive tool for bridging the gap between theory and practice by initiating a process of self-reflection and personal development.

The intervention of an alternative approach to learning, fostered by the LC technique, focuses on student teachers' personal development and their participation in a community of practice.
The analysis of the data, LC documents and interviews with the seven trainees and two mentors gave me the confirmation and the encouragement which I needed to go on to the second step of this alternative and innovative approach in my exploratory and unfolding action research study. Before doing so, there was a need to gain more knowledge about the experience of student teachers who had successfully completed the RE modules. These students would be in their 3 year of the 4 year training programme. In Chapter 5 I report my findings from the survey which I carried out in two ITE colleges.

CHAPTER 5

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENT TEACHERS AS PART OF THE FIRST ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the second part of my first action research cycle. Having explored mentor-student teacher experiences by means of LC as a tool for school-based practice, I needed to investigate the experience of future RE teachers who had taken part in the compulsory RE module in the ITE programme. Consequently I conducted a survey among two cohorts of student teachers in two colleges, BUC and NLA. These student teachers had successfully completed the compulsory RE module and were now in their 3rd year of ITE. As this study was carried out in the study year following the first LC intervention, some of the student teachers taking part in the first LC experiment would be included in the BUC cohort. The purpose of this study was to explore the quality of classroom experience of RE, student teacher-mentor relationship and the respondents' perception of a good RE teacher and how this good teacher could be educated. In the following I report the planning, reflection, actions, data collection and analysis of data which I carried out in this investigation.

5.2 Planning and reflection for action

Action research can apply a wide range of data-gathering methods, (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005) such as quantitative and qualitative methods. Creswell calls this a mixed data collection method (Creswell, 2003: 208).

After having conducted the first LC intervention, which was based on a qualitative approach, I felt a need to investigate in greater depth the experience of student teachers who had completed the RE

module as part of their general teacher education programme. Since the framework of the RE programme within teacher education is limited, I came to realise that my knowledge about student teachers' experience and personal views was not sufficient. In order for me as a teacher educator to attain a higher level of academic perspective, I needed to find out more about the students teachers' experiences, their views and opinions and more precisely to investigate who they are and what they think. I considered that the knowledge which I could gain in this process would help me to be able to answer my third research question about what changes I needed to make in my practice as a teacher educator in order to promote the active participation in an alternative practice of groups of student teachers and mentors.

Consequently I decided to compose a questionnaire based on a limited number of questions. The reason for this choice was that I imagined that this could easily be done in collaboration with some of my work colleagues in the Department of Pedagogy, a compulsory subject in the 3rd year of the ITE programme. My first study was carried out with a small group of student teachers in their second year of ITE. These students were now in their third year of the teacher education programme in which the subject of pedagogy is compulsory as is Norwegian. I needed to find an appropriate framework to gather my data where whole classes of 20-25 students would be present. In the pedagogy lessons most students would be present and I could administer the questionnaire myself by going into their classrooms. Thus I could reach whole cohorts of student teachers, including the group who took part in the first LC intervention.

In order to process this questionnaire I contacted two colleagues in the Department of Pedagogy who had taken part in the first LC workshop. They agreed to give me some time of their lessons where I could explain the purpose and procedure of the questionnaire for the students. They also

got permission for me to collect these data from groups of students from the other lecturers in pedagogy. By doing this myself, meeting all the students and explaining the purpose of my research, I got the agreement of all the students present to take part in the study.

5.2.1 Participants in the survey

The questionnaire was given to student teachers who had successfully completed the required compulsory modules in RE as part of their general ITE programme in a state college, BUC. The data collected from BUC were collected by me as a researcher (see Appendix 4a and 4b).
I personally visited various groups of student teachers and collected all together 121 responses. In order to increase the number of participants, I contacted another teacher training college in Bergen called the Norwegian Learning Academy (NLA), which is a private Lutheran College. The survey at this college was carried out by a colleague in the RE department and generated a further 58 responses. Thus numbers of respondents now totalled 179, not randomly selected.

The two colleges of BUC and NLA have to implement the same RE programme composed on the basis of the general national RE curriculum and create course designs according to the specific aims outlined for teacher education in the national curriculum (NC, 1998, 2003). Thus a comparative study between these two colleges is feasible, detecting possible similarities and differences between the variables. From the perspective of RE, similarities and variations in personal attitudes, views about the teaching of religions and world views among student teachers attending a state college and a private Lutheran college are of interest not only for me as an RE educator, but presumably also of general interest.

5.2.2 The Questionnaire

Before designing the questionnaire, I created a table in order to identify the 7 variables of this questionnaire. This table is modelled upon Cresswell, 1994: 12. (Appendices 4a and 4b are two versions of the questionnaire, 4a is the original Norwegian version which was used and 4b is the English translation).

VARIABLE NAME	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	ITEMS ON THE SURVEY
Independent Variable 01 Age	**Descriptive research question 01** Age?	See question 1 Section I
Independent Variable 02 Gender	**Descriptive research question 02** Gender?	See question 2 Section I
Dependent Variable 03 RE experience in schools	**Descriptive research question 11** How do you evaluate your RE classroom experience?	See question 3 Section II
Dependent Variable 04 Interaction with mentor	**Descriptive research question 12** How do you evaluate your interaction with your mentor?	See question 4 Section II
Dependent Variable 05 RE's stimulation of personnel growth and teacher attitude	**Descriptive research question 13** Do you see any relationship between RE's potential of stimulating learners' personnel development and growth and the attitude of the RE teacher?	See question 5 Section III
Dependent Variable 06 Characteristics of a good RE teacher	**Descriptive research question 14** How would you describe a good RE teacher?	See question 6 Section III
Dependent Variable 07 The education of a good RE teacher	**Descriptive research question 15** How can this good RE teacher be educated?	See question 7 Section IV

Table 5-1: Questionnaire variables

The questionnaire determines two independent variables and five dependent variables of which the two last ones are revealed in open-ended questions and as such will be analysed from the perspective of a qualitative analysis scheme. The items are classified in four different sections and are analysed individually under the headings of these four sections.

Sections I and II comprise variables which are treated as quantitative data and as such tested and analysed by the SPSS soft ware programme. The qualitative data are analysed manually according to patterns and themes in the responses. I am using the categories of dependant and independent variables as descriptive categories in my analysis, with gender and age described as

independent variables. I am not using the concept of ‘variables’ as it is used in a controlled experimental design. For a transparent and structured presentation, the analysis will be presented according to the structure of the survey, combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

5.2.3 Part I of the Questionnaire: Personal questions.

Independent Variables 01-02

Variable 01. Age of participants

Age group	**Frequency**	**%**	**Valid %**
19-25	135	75.4	75.4
26-35	26	14.5	14.5
36-50	18	10.1	10.1
Total	**179**	**100**	**100**
Missing	0	0.0	
Grand total	**179**	**100**	

Table 5-2: Age of Participants

As can been seen in Table 5.2 more than 75% of student teachers are between 19 and 25 years of age. The two other groups are smaller, the age-range 26-35, 14.5 % and the age-range 36-50, 10.1 %. Accordingly it is possible to say that the vast majority of student teachers are quite young.

As the survey was conducted when these students had already undergone two years of their professional training as teachers and Norwegians enter higher education normally from the age of 19, it is possible to comment that most student teachers who enter teacher education courses are starting this education as their first professional training. Nevertheless, 44 student teachers are 26 years old or more, putting 24.6 % of the whole population in the category of ‘mature students’ when they start their professional training as teachers.

Thus it can be assumed that student teachers in this age group might have some experience of other studies, professional occupation or work which teacher educators should know, take into account and made constructive use of in course designs and practices.

Variable 02. Gender of Participants

The second independent variable is their gender. This question is not only of interest for this study, but generally the question of gender distribution in education is important. Initial teacher education seems to attract more females than males.

Gender	**frequency**	**%**	**Valid %**
Female	114	63.7	78.6
Male	31	17.3	21.4
Total	**145**	**81.0**	**100**
Missing	34	19.0	
Grand total	**179**	**100.0**	

Table 5-3: Gender of Participants

63.7 % of the 145 respondents to the question about gender state that they are females while 17.3 % state that they are males. This result indicates the general problem of the unequal gender distribution in teacher education with implications for primary and lower secondary schools in Norway. 19% (n=34) of the responses to this question were missing. Whether this fact is due to negligence or deliberate choice is impossible to ascertain.

The result of the findings, however, indicates the fact that a biased distribution of gender exists in ITE, entailing the same phenomenon in the teaching profession.

The feminisation of education, particularly in preschool, primary and lower secondary schools is a problem not only in Norway, but also in many other Western countries.

5.3 Part II of the Questionnaire:

Practice experience: Dependent variables 3 and 4

Part II of the questionnaire consists of dependent variables 3 and 4. They are related to the experience of school-based practice. Each item starts with a question and invitation to give a short explanation or commentary for the answer.

Item 3 is an assessment of the general experience of practice while item 4 is about how successful from the trainees' perspectives the co-operation with their mentors was. The analyses will first report on the answers and then look at the commentaries.

5.3.1 Dependent variable 03

Dependent variable 03:

Question: How do you evaluate your classroom experience in RE in your practice periods**?**

1=poor 2= good 3= very good

valid	*f*	*%*	*Valid %*
1	35	19.6	19.8
2	120	67.0	67.8
3	22	12.3	12.4
total	177	98.9	100.0
missing	2	1.1	
total	179	100.0	

Table 5-4: Classroom experience

As can be seen from these findings, the number of trainees who define their classroom experience in RE during their practice periods as poor is quite high; 35=19.6% put themselves in this category while 22=12.3% describe it as very good. The majority, 120=67.0%, say that it was good.

5.3.2 Dependent variable 03b: Commentaries on variable 03

For this item respondents were asked to give a brief commentary or explanation for their choice of category. The distribution of answers according the three categories along with commentaries/explanations is as follows:

category	**Number of respondents**	**Number of commentaries/explanations**	**Missing**
Poor	35	31	4
Good	120	92	28
Very good	22	15	7
Total	178	138	39

Table 5-5: Overview of the distribution of categories

As can be seen from Table 5.5, 39 respondents did not give any explanation or commentary. Nevertheless we are left with 138 responses which might give some valuable information for the study. The reason why it is important to look at the commentaries given by respondents of the various categories is that if they are based on genuine experience from practice verbalised by the student teachers themselves. The report is given according to these categories.

5.3.3 Poor practice experience

The lowest category is defined as a poor practice experience. For me as a researcher, it is important to identify the reasons for this classification.

In reviewing the answers the most frequently recurring theme is lack of experience in RE and is verbalised as follows:

> …I did not teach RE at all… (S147)
> …RE was not prioritised in my practice school… (S96)
> …I had very few RE lesson in my school practice… (S11)
> …I had very little practice in RE… (S16)

The majority of the 31 commentaries, 27 to be exact, mention lack of experience in RE either no experience at all or very limited experience. This is somewhat surprising, as the practice period in the spring term of the RE programme is supposed to focus on the teaching and learning of RE in schools.

The way in which school practice is organised seems to be an impediment for field-based experience in RE, as mentioned by the following two trainees:

> …Because of few RE lessons, about two in a week, and we only had three weeks of practice, four trainees had to share six lessons and I didn't get any of them… (S76)

> …The four of us planned the RE lessons together. Unfortunately I didn't get the experience of teaching any of them myself… (S74)

One student teacher feels a high degree of incoherence between the way in which RE was taught in the college and what they were supposed to do in the RE classroom in school:

> …Because of too little focus on pedagogies in the college based RE course, I was not well prepared for my school practice, I feel that teacher educators in RE should change their attitude and compose more school-oriented courses… (S38)

5.3.4 Good practice experience

As displayed in Table 5.5, most of the responses are in the category good; 120 altogether and 92 of these respondents give a commentary or explanation. In reviewing the answers there are many who have the same lack of experience in the teaching of RE as those in the category above. They place themselves, however, in the category of good practice experience.

In reviewing the commentaries, 33 trainees in BUC and 13 trainees in NLA claim that their experience in the teaching of RE was very limited. Altogether in the whole cohort of 92 across both colleges, 46 describe this lack of experience. The reason why they classify their experience as good is probably that, in spite of the limited experience, they had some positive personal experiences. It is not very easy to detect the reason for these positive experiences, as many respondents are very brief in their commentaries, merely stating that their practice experience was short or limited, but what they did was good, for example like the following:

> …I didn't teach many RE lessons, but those I taught were good… (S126*)*

The possibility of teaching a particular subject of interest seems to be one of the reasons for classifying their practice experience in RE as good.

> …I was able to teach ethics in 6th grade which was very exciting… (S2)

> …I taught about the religious dimension in art, connected to Christianity and felt that I had been well prepared for this task in the college RE course… (S27)

> …I got involved in a project connected to the introduction of Christianity to Norway. I could try out narratives and ways of dealing with particular stories… (S107)

Another reason for a good experience of practice is the possibility of trying out specific pedagogies and approaches;

> …I was able to try some approaches in RE related to narratives in the teaching of Judaism… (S14)

> …I tried out a teaching approach in RE where the task was to compare specifik topics related to religions and worldviews… (S17)
> …The mentor encouraged us to try out various pedagogies in RE… (S33)

In spite of these positive experiences in the teaching of RE, there are all together 73 students, the 27 from the category ‘poor’ (see 5.3.3) and 46 from the category ‘good’ (see 5.3.4) who report limited experience of the learning to teach RE.

5.3.5 Very good practice experience in RE

22 respondents declare their practice experience to be very good and 15 of these give a reason. It seems to be of importance that RE is considered among learners to be an interesting subject. Thus a positive RE environment evokes a positive experience for trainees, expressed in various ways:

> …The pupils were very eager to learn about religions… (S7)

> …The theme of my RE experience was Hinduism. There was a Hindu pupil in this class. We were able to make use of his experience constructively. The pupils were curious but showed a lot of respect for his religion and religious practice. I felt that the Hindu pupil was proud of his religion and was happy to share his experience with the others. It was a very good experience for me as a future RE teacher… (S35)

This answer suggests that the quality of the learning environment established in the classroom seems to play a vital part in the perception of the success of their performances among trainees in RE. The possibility of trying out new pedagogies contributes to the feeling of the successful practice of RE among trainees, who state this experience in various ways:

> …I had a very good experience because I got involved in an RE project related to both Christianity and Hinduism, and we could use more time than normal for RE… (S70)

> …RE opens up many possibilities for interesting and challenging pedagogies which we were motivated to try out during our practice period… (S 81)

> …I tried out various activities, drama, narratives, self-composed cartoons, and we even created a monastery for the teaching and learning about Benedict… (S15)

> …I got the opportunity to teach RE in a multicultural classroom. I was challenged by many questions from the pupils about, for example, various creation stories. I also used a number of different artefacts… (S13)

5.3.6 Conclusion

According to the views of these student teachers neither the context nor the time allowed is adequate for their need to develop their skills and competencies as future RE teachers. Reading those who are satisfied with their experience their feelings are based on the possibility of having sufficient teaching experience and being able to try out various pedagogies with learners who are interested in religious education.

5.4 Dependent variable 04: Interaction with mentors

Dependent variable 04*:* How would you describe your interaction with your mentor?

1=poor 2= good 3= very good

Valid	***f***	***%***	***Valid 100%***
1	23	12.8	13.0
2	92	51.4	52.0

3	62	34.6	35.0
total	177	98.9	100.0
missing	2	1.1	
Total	**179**	**100**	
Missing	0	0	
Grand total	**179**	**100**	

Table 5-6: Student teacher-mentor interactions

Table 5.6 shows that there are 92 respondents (51.4%) who had a good interaction with their mentors and 62 (34.6%) declare this interaction to be very good. 23 (12.8%) of the respondents consider it to be poor. It may be interesting to get a picture of the arguments behind these choices.

5.4.1 Dependent variable 04b

Distribution of responses and commentaries in the three categories,

poor-good-very good

category	**Number of respondents**	**Number of commentaries/explanations**	**Missing**
poor	23	21	2
good	92	62	30
very good	62	50	12
total	177	133	44

Table 5-7: Distribution of categories

Human interactions are probably difficult to describe in a language which can convey feelings. As can be seen in **Table 5.7** as many as 44 respondents gave no reason for their answer. As for variable 3 it may be of interest to cite some of the arguments in the three categories starting from the lowest one.

5.4.2 Poor interaction with the mentor: some views

The main reason for poor interaction seems to be the lack of RE competence among mentors and thus no supervision in the teaching and learning of RE was given as a quite natural consequence. However, this is an unexpected finding because, as mentioned before, this particular practice period is supposed to concentrate on RE and the provision of frameworks, skilled mentors and good teaching and learning conditions are anticipated. Some of the arguments are listed below:

> …My mentor was not an RE teacher. We worked on a project and RE was put aside… (S11)
> …We did not work with RE at all… (S19)
> …During my practice period I never met the RE teacher/mentor even if I tried to make an appointment… (S72)

Another experience is that without any mentoring or discussion about planning and conducting an RE lesson, trainees are simply told to give the lesson, leaving them with a feeling of a shortcoming in the provision and unease.

> …I felt that I was just thrown into the tasks and had to take responsibility for my teaching by myself. It was quite frustrating… (S50)

Another student was given none of the responsibility s/he had wanted:

> …We were used as class assistants… (S78)

The same lack of trust and responsibility was felt by the respondent who claimed:

> …I was very disappointed with my mentor who interfered several times when I was teaching. She criticised her pupils openly, it was very unpleasant… (S143)

The relationship between mentor and trainee seems to be of importance as remarked upon by one respondent:

> …I had a very bad relationship with my mentor not only in RE but in all subjects… (S128)

5.4.3 Good interaction with mentors

There were altogether 92 respondents who felt that the interaction with mentor was good. However, 30 of them gave no reason for saying this, leaving 62 explanatory comments. The most frequently recurring issue seems to be how well the mentor is able to communicate and interact with the trainee in order to support and encourage her/him to engage in the teaching and learning tasks. For this an open dialogue and good communication has to be established. Trainees explain this in various ways:

> …We had a good communication and relationship… (S149)

> …The mentor helped me a lot. We had a good relationship and she had a lot of ideas for appropriate teaching and learning activities… (S156)

> …My interaction with my mentor was good and quite constructive a positive experience for me… (S25)

5.4.4 Very good interaction with the mentor

There are 62 respondents who had a very good interaction with their mentors, 50 of them explained why it was very good. The attitudes and manner of the mentors seem to have had a vital impact on the way in which the trainees perceived the relationship. Openness, attention, honesty, good communication, constructive support and feedback recur as themes in the commentaries:

> …There was an open and good dialogue between mentor and trainees… (S7)

> …The mentor was open and honest. She was a good mentor and conflict solver… (S57)

The experience of the mentor as someone who can ease tension and solve conflicts not only among pupils in the classroom, but also in the group of trainees is probably a factor which contributes to the success of the school practice. Another recurrent theme is receiving encouragement and support to try out new pedagogies and ways of work.

Because of the fact that RE as a multi-faith, non-confessional subject is a new construct in the Norwegian school system, new pedagogies have to be created and implemented in the classroom. Trainees may have studied and created new pedagogies connected to the RE modules in the colleges, but have never been able to implement these new ways of working and test how effective they are in the classroom.

When these trainees come for school practice they are eager to get sufficient space to implement these new ways of work as authentic experiences of teaching and learning.

Thus a mentor who clearly demonstrates a receptive attitude towards new pedagogies and constructively support any experimental initiative suggested by trainees seems to contribute to their professional and personal development. Here are the opinions of this experience by some of these trainees:

> …The mentor was very open and receptive. We got the support and space needed to try out new ways of work in RE… (S81)

> …We had a lot of ideas for our RE lessons. We were encouraged to discuss these with our mentor. She helped us a lot to modify and adjust to the context of the classroom and the pupils. Then we got the freedom we wanted to make it work… (S84)

The skills and experience of the mentor are factors which influence and underpin the quality of interactions with trainees. The ability to have an open and good communication seems to be essential as stated in the following:

> …The mentor was a good mentor, an open person with good communication skills… (S139)

> …The mentor was a good communicator with a positive attitude towards ideas and creativity among trainees. I felt that we got the support we needed to try out new pedagogies… (S86)

> …My mentor was engaged, clever and skilled… (S118)

> …The mentor helped us to bridge the gap between our knowledge and experience and that of the pupils. He chaired our discussions to let everyone participate and valued our ideas and made us feel confident… (S37)

5.4.5 Conclusion:

From these responses it could be argued that in order to initiate a very good interaction between mentor and trainees during the school-based practice period, the personal skills, attitudes and behaviour of the mentor play a vital part. Openness towards new ideas and sufficient space and

support are essential for trainees' feeling of success. A supportive manner and constructive feedback are elements which are important features for a very good assessment of the mentor by trainees.

5.5 Part III of the Questionnaire: The RE teacher: Dependent variables 05 and 06

Variables 05 of part III of the questionnaire is constructed the same way as the two variables 03 and 04 in part II.

Variable 6, however, is an open-ended question with the purpose of exploring the views of the respondents as to their personal images of a good RE teacher.

5.5.1 Dependent variable 05

There is an assumption in this study that there is a connection between the potential of RE to stimulate personal development and growth among learners and the personal skills and attitude among RE teachers. The purpose of variable 05 is to explore to what extent this view is recognised among future teachers of religious education. Table 5.8 shows the findings.

Question:

Do you see any connection between the potential of RE to stimulate personal development and growth and the personal skills and attitudes of the RE teacher?

1=minor 2=medium 3=strong

valid	***f***	***%***	***valid %***
1	4	2.2	2.2
2	77	43.0	43.0
3	88	49.2	49.2
Total	**169**	**94.4**	
missing	10	5.6	5.6
Grand total	**179**	**100**	**100**

Table 5-8: Connection of aims of RE and personal qualities of the RE teacher

As can be seen from **Table 5.8**, there were 169 responses (a 94, 4% response rate) to this question. As many as 88 (49, 2 %) claim that there is a close connection between the particular aim of RE to stimulate personal development and growth and the skills and attitudes of the RE teacher.The number of respondents who gave an explanatory comment with their answer was, however, not very high as can be seen in the following table:

Categories	**Number of respondents**	**Number of commentaries /explanations from BUC**	**Number of commentaries /explanations from NLA**	**Total**
1	4	0	0	0
2	77	24	3	27
3	88	45	17	62
	179			85

Table 5-9: Comments on variable 05 from the two colleges

As can be seen from Table 5.9 the 4 respondents who did not see a significant connection between the purpose of RE of stimulating personal development and growth and the skills and attitudes of the RE teacher, do not give any explanation for this view. Hence we are left without any clue. For those who see the relevance there are 27 comments albeit brief ones.

For those who see a close connection there are 62 responses altogether and these are quite informative. Since this category was the one most commented upon, it may be worthwhile to cite some of the most interesting ones.

There seems to be an understanding that there is a clear connection between purpose and strategies. The purpose has to be present in the mind of the RE teacher in the planning of the teaching and learning.

> …A multi- faith approach to RE is supposed to stimulate all learners' identity formation. The RE teacher has to demonstrate skills and attitudes relevant to the personal development and growth of all learners… (S27)

> …The RE teacher will be a role model for learners and has to take learners' perspectives about religions and worldviews into consideration in a manner showing respect and tolerance…(S25)

> …If the purpose of RE is to stimulate the learner to develop and grow on a personal level, the RE teacher has to be engaged and enthusiastic about the subject in all interactions with learners… (S28)

> …An RE teacher is a facilitator of values. S/he has to behave according to these values in a way that it becomes quite clear for all learners present… (S30)

> …The RE teacher has to demonstrate attitudes that give the learner space and freedom to voice his or her views and opinions without being manipulated by the teacher… (S138)

5.5.2 Conclusion

There seems to be an understanding among these respondents that it is important to put the values and attitudes defined in the curriculum of RE into action. If personal development and growth are to be stimulated, then the RE teacher has to act upon these values in the activities and interactions which s/he creates and processes with the learner/student teacher. Curriculum values and attitudes are according to Whitehead and McNiff (2006) abstract concepts as they claim:

> ….For them to make sense, the values themselves need to be understood as real-life practices. They need to be seen in lived relations with others….
>
> (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 58)

For me as a teacher educator the challenge is to create and be able to demonstrate a pedagogy which promotes both understanding and actions of essential values.

5.5.3 Variable 06: Open-ended question about the good RE teacher

Variable 06 is an open-ended question seeking to explore students teachers' views of what constitutes a good RE teacher. It is connected to the main research question of how you can educate a good RE teacher within the framework of initial teacher education, ITE, in Norway. Before working out a proper education and training to produce this good RE teacher, the main characteristics of such an individual must be identified.

5.5.4 Responses to variable 06 from the two colleges

Out of the cohort of 121 student teachers from BUC who participated in the survey, 119 gave a written answer to this question while of the cohort of 58 in NLA, 57 answered the same questions. This gave altogether 176 responses.

The analysis of these data will be reported according to specific themes combined with various tables to give an overview of the representation of personal views.

5.5.5 The importance of knowledge

There seems to be an understanding that adequate knowledge is important in order to be able to teach religious education successfully. This understanding was verbalised in various ways. The following are some illustrations of how this concept was expressed as parts of a wider argument:

> …A good RE teacher has an extended knowledge of various religions and world views… (S12)

> …A good RE teacher knows the subject area well… (S10)

> …A good RE teacher has good knowledge of all topics of the curriculum… (S110)

The emphasis on knowledge was argued by 52 students out of 119 at BUC and by 12 out of 57 at NLA. In some arguments the concept of knowledge or the requirement of the RE teacher to be knowledgeable, underpins the arguments put forward in other ways as follows:

> …A good RE teacher has an extended insight in various religions and world views… (S12)

> …A good RE teacher creates her/his teaching from facts and not from personal opinions… (S163)

In the last quotation the emphasis is not only on the importance of knowledge, but an allusion to the importance of being objective and not letting personal convictions influence the teaching.

5.5.6 A good RE teacher compared to any other good teacher

One would have expected that many students hold the view that a good RE teacher is like any other good teacher. However only two respondents out the whole cohort of 176 argued positively for this view:

> …A good RE teacher is like any other good teacher, knowledgeable, engaged and inspired with the ability to reflect upon the teaching and learning process… (118)

> …The only difference between a teacher and an RE teacher is the specific knowledge in RE the latter has to demonstrate… (S153)

5.5.7 What kind of knowledge is essential in RE?

A good RE teacher is supposed to be knowledgeable enough to devise good and interesting teaching and learning activities. This good teaching stems from a genuine enthusiasm for RE which has to underpin all classroom interactions and activities:

> …A good RE teacher has to demonstrate a personal interest in RE… (S143)

This particular enthusiasm for the subject is emphasised by several students.

The limited time for religious education is seen as a problem. Thus relevant items from the content of the curriculum have to be chosen for classroom work as it is impossible to cover all subject areas:

> …A good RE teacher teaches the most relevant topics related to Christian, religious and ethical knowledge in an interesting and objective way… (S18)

The relevance of RE seems for the following respondent to be connected to current social and political issues:

> …A good RE teacher understands the importance of religions worldwide. This teacher is able to focus on relevant topics as current international conflicts, inspired by religions and is well informed about political issues… (S 65)

The view of the importance of knowledge as a basis for teaching seems to be quite strong. There is, however, an assumption that RE knowledge has to be updated and thus a good RE teacher will always be in a process of seeking new knowledge, insight and understanding as argued below:

> …A good RE teacher is strong in knowledge, interested in RE, inspired by the subject, curious and always seeking new knowledge combined with an open, tolerant and experimental attitude… (S38)

In teaching and learning activities with pupils in the RE classroom the emphasis on relevance includes the ability to make the learning relevant and interesting for learners:

> …A good RE teacher is someone who is able to teach in an engaged and spiritual way from a focus on relevant issues for learners. By demonstrating good communication skills and challenging learners to engage in discussions of RE topics and take part in dialogues and discussions, learners are stimulated to develop thinking skills and reflection. This process might entail personal development and respect towards religions. Thus a deeper understanding of the variety of religious and non religious views in the classroom and beyond might occur…(S24)

5.5.8 Groundings for RE knowledge

The knowledge acquired in an RE course is perceived as a tool for promoting understanding and fighting xenophobia:

> …Through knowledge, RE promotes the understanding of other religions. This is important because lack of knowledge might inspire xenophobia… (S3)

5.5.9 Specific RE attitudes and values

In this study there is an assumption that specific attitudes and personal qualities and skills are required for a successful teaching of RE. For a transparent presentation of the findings, two tables are created of which the first Table 5.10 reports on attitudes and the second, Table 5.11 on skills. Responses from the two ITE colleges, Bergen University College, BUC and Norwegian Learning Academy, NLA, are presented separately and then summarized.

Attitudes:

Concept	**BUC**	**NLA**	**Sum**
open	42	15	57
respectful	39	13	52
tolerant	37	12	49
neutral	18	3	18
demonstrate equality	12	6	18
empathic	15	3	18
engaged	10	4	15
reflective	14	1	15
objective	3	5	8
critical	6	0	6
positive	4	2	6
non judgemental	4	1	5
caring	2	3	5
honest	2	2	4
wise	1	0	1
helpful	1	0	1

Table 5-10 Independent variable 06*:* How would you describe a good RE teacher**?**

The attitudes most appreciated in a good RE teacher in both colleges are the ability to be open, respectful and tolerant. To get a wider perspective on the various constructs which respondents attribute to these attitudes the following quotations may be helpful: (presented as a summary of the responses listed in Table 5.10)

> …A good RE teacher…is respectful in dealing with religions and faiths,…is open towards questions,…demonstrates respect for all learners, regardless of religious or non-religious background,… is open to a variety of perspectives,…is able to respect all religions and worldviews particularly those represented by pupils in the classroom,…open to discussions and dialogues,…respects the opinions and religious views of pupils, and their ethnic, religious and cultural background,…demonstrates tolerance in all interactions with learners in the classroom and beyond,…shows respect for other people's faith and interpretation of the word,…is tolerant and open combined with a critical view,…open for new ides and change,…is an open person without prejudices who sees the importance of the religious dimension in education internationally,…is tolerant towards pupils' personal views,…demonstrates respect and tolerance in her/his behaviour and is able to stimulate these attitudes in teacher-learner interactions and in learner-learner interactions,…acts upon his/her values in such a way that pupils experience cohesion between theory and practice on a personal level…

The understanding of the importance of tolerance as a guidance in good practice is supposed to embrace all participants in various communities of learning in ITE. Some student teachers

experience this attitude rarely among their classmates and would like the teacher educator to challenge and give feedback to students who are not capable of demonstrating it in the classroom and beyond.

They want the teacher educator to intervene, but are also creative when it comes to ideas for relating to this problem, to reflection and possible change as the following argument shows:

> …It is a challenge and a duty for teacher educators to give feedback to student teachers who are not tolerant towards their classmates. This problem could be dealt with in role plays where actual situations are exposed, and subjected to discussion. Hopefully, reflection and change of attitude will be the result… (S115)

As these student teachers work in groups for their school-based experience, they observe the teaching of their classmates and develop some experience of evaluating the quality of teaching among trainees. These critical student teachers are not satisfied with the fact that very few student teachers are advised not to proceed with ITE and would like this procedure to change:

> …Teacher educators ought to be more critical and challenging in their interactions with trainees and have the courage to redirect those who show incompetence in the classroom teaching… (S118)

5.5.10 Specific skills attributed to a good RE teacher

As stated previously in this chapter, the importance of knowledge and its various aspects are obvious and will not be taken any further. However, an overview of the additional skills which

are perceived by respondents to be desirable might be of interest for the study. The following table is composed the same way as **Table 5.10**.

RE Skills:

Independent variable 06**:** How would you describe a good RE teacher?

Concepts	**BUC**	**NLA**	**Sum**
Initiates and conducts dialogues and discussions	15	7	22
Educates pupils does not instruct or manipulate them	13	4	17
Makes use of a variety of pedagogies	12	3	15
Transmits knowledge	11	3	14
Motivates and stimulates pupils' learning	9	1	10
Role model	6	1	7
Transmitter of values	5	2	7
A good storyteller	5	2	7
Creates good relationship with parents	5	2	7
Makes use of art, music, artefacts, drama in RE	5	2	7
A good listener	4	3	7
Promotes reflection	5	1	6
Demonstrates good professional ethics	4	2	6
Demonstrates good communication skills	3	2	5
Creates inclusive teaching and learning activities	4	0	4
Uses a narrative approach	3	1	4
Composes locally adapted RE projects	3	1	4
Does not act as a missionary	1	3	4
Is well prepared for lessons	3	0	3
Experimental	2	0	2
Good in solving problems and conflicts	2	0	2
Is able to challenge learners	2	0	2
Has a good social intelligence	1	1	2
A guide	1	1	2
Structured	2	0	2
Stimulates curiosity and excitement among learners	0	1	1
Is able to compare various religious views	0	1	1
Facilitator of learning processes	0	1	1

Table 5-11: Skills of a good RE teacher

As can be seen from **Table 5.11** student teachers are quite creative and specific in their ideas about what skills are needed for a good RE teacher. Given the limited time these student teachers had to answer the questionnaire, a deep reflection about these issues could not be expected. Nevertheless, there is among the responses a clear understanding that personal maturity and a high level of professional competence are essential for the quality of the teacher and his/her teaching. First of all, the RE teacher has to have good communication skills and be an educator and not an instructor, missionary or preacher. Thus the RE classroom is a place where learners are educated and not instructed or manipulated.

The general view is that the personal religious views of teachers are not supposed to guide the teaching and interactions with learners since the main task is to promote equality between religions and worldviews by appropriate pedagogies and ways of work promoting respect and tolerance. In fact among the 157 responses only one, S126 holds the view that an RE teacher has to have a personal religious belief:

> …The aim of the teaching of religions has to be the religious growth of the learner. The RE teacher has to be Christian…(S126)

The majority of the respondents, however, supported an attitude of equality in the teaching and learning strategies of RE. Among these arguments was the following:

> …A good RE teacher must be equally good in the teaching of all religions in the curriculum, even a devoted Christian RE teacher must not put his/her religion in front of other religions… (S160)

The concern that RE should not be influenced by personal religious or non-religious views is shared by many students in both ITE colleges. The following quotations reveal this concern:

> …A good RE teacher is able to teach all religions in such an equal and fair way that none of the learners is able to tell what religion, if any, this teacher has… (S153)

> …A good RE teacher has to respect various religions and life stances and not let personal views influence the teaching, but seek to create equality among various perspectives occurring in RE lessons… (S165)

> …A good RE teacher does not put his/her religion forward as the true religion, but is able to demonstrate in his/her interactions with learners, tolerance, empathy, understanding and respect. This attitude has to be combined with a deeper insight connected to various ideas about religions, secular perspectives and ethics globally… (S15)

The content of the subject areas in RE seems to play a vital role and is regarded as influential for the way that the RE teacher behaves. The teaching of ethics and moral values is an important part of the curriculum. As the purpose of this education is to not only to acquire and internalise the knowledge, but to create better ways for people relating to each other, there is a claim that the RE teacher must be able to demonstrate these values on a personal level and act as a role model for an ethical and moral behaviour.

The following quotations argue for this view:

> …A good RE teacher has a thorough understanding of the fact that your attitudes will influence your acts. Accordingly you have to consider how you can establish cohesion between what you say and what you do in all interactions with learners… (S19)

> …A good RE teacher has to demonstrate a personal integrity, bridge the gap between theory and practice when it comes to professional ethics, never show a judgemental or patronising behaviour in his/her interactions with pupils… (S119)

5.5.11 Conclusion

From these views there seems to be a clear understanding of the connection between the aim of RE to promote personal development and growth among learners and how successful the RE teacher is to demonstrate specific values, attitudes and behaviour in his/her interactions with learners in the classroom. An RE teacher who is not able to act upon the ethics which s/he seeks to promote will lose the respect of learners who subsequently will not maintain interest in this subject. Accordingly, a teacher educator needs to find ways of encouraging future RE teachers to understand that all teachers are accountable for what they do and how they act in relation to their pupils, as a life-long learning process.

5.6 Part IV dependent variable 07: The education of the good RE teacher

The question of how a good RE teacher can be educated constitutes the last open-ended question of the questionnaire. The response rate of variable 07 was a little lower than that of the previous variable 06. From BUC there were 109 written responses out of the cohort of 121 and from NLA there are 47 responses form a cohort of 58. This gives altogether 156 responses with a total of 23 who gave no explanatory comment.

The responses given by the 156 respondents are very varied. A great many are very constructive, while others give a very brief answer.

Among these rather short answers some express satisfactions with the RE programme in various ways and see no need of improvements. Others give their answer in brief statement or by suggesting an idea. Some judge this to depend entirely on personal qualifications and give no further details. The following table gives an overview of these responses from the two colleges:

Responses	**BUC**	**NLA**	**Sum**
No answer	12	11	23
I am satisfied with the RE course as it is	15	2	17
Depends on personal qualities	4	1	5
total	31	14	45

Table 5-12: Overview of three general responses from the two colleges

As can be seen from Table 5.12, 45 respondents did not offer any idea of how to improve the education of the RE teacher. The reason for the missing answers, 23 altogether, is impossible to discover. However, these 23 missing answers, together with the 17 who were satisfied with the course and 5 respondents who declare teacher competencies to depend on personal ability, imply that nearly 1/3 of the whole sample did not answer the question of how a good RE teacher can be educated. We are therefore left with a sample consisting of 134 answers distributed as 44 at NLA and 90 at BUC respondents who gave various responses to the question. These responses will be reported under various headings as follows:

5.6.1 The teacher educator as a role model for future teachers

In both colleges there is a perception that teacher educators are role models for future teachers. Teacher educators whom student teachers regard as exemplars of good practice are mentioned by names. Strong feelings are also expressed towards lecturers who do not deliver an appropriate course and thus ought to find another job.

This view, however, is sometimes perceived as a personal impetus to do better themselves, since their experience of poor teaching makes them creative in supplying ideas of what to do to improve courses and make a difference. This reaction might be interpreted as fruitful for personal development.

There seems to be a rather strong view that the way in which teacher educators design their courses, teach, interact, communicate and behave in the teaching and learning activities with students is very important for the images which student teachers themselves are able to construct and consequently act upon in the religious education classroom.

In the description of the good RE teacher item 06, 7 out of 177 mention the RE teacher as a role model for learners. In item 07 this perception is emphasised by14 respondents altogether from the two colleges distributed as follows:

	BUC	**NLA**	**sum**
Good role models	11	3	14

Table 5-13: The RE teacher as a role model

As the multi-faith approach to RE is new to Norway, trainees in ITE have no experience of this subject from their own schooling. Accordingly they seek resources and models both in schools and in the college for their personal construction of how to teach this subject and become a good RE teacher.

5.6.2 The importance of pedagogies and teaching experience

The course model subjected to evaluation in this study lasts for approximately ten to twelve weeks throughout a study year, with five weeks of field-based experience in schools.

This authentic experience of teaching seems from the student teachers' perspective to be insufficient for acquiring the skills needed to enact the role of a good RE teacher.

There is a widespread view of the need to emphasise pedagogies and practice more in order to be better prepared for the realities of the classroom. The following table reports how this view was conceptualised and distributed in the two colleges.

views	BUC	NLA	sum
field-based experience	15	7	22
pedagogies	14	5	19
classroom situation in RE	10	2	12
application of theory to practice	5	2	7
			60

Table 5-14: Emphasis on pedagogies and practice

Sixty of the respondents from the cohort of 157 respondents would like to have more emphasis put on the teaching experience of religious education and are quite articulate and constructive in the way they argue for this need:

> …A good education of future RE teachers ought to construct a course design in which theory and classroom pedagogies are more integrated… (S89)

> …Student teachers should be better prepared for authentic situations and dilemmas in the RE classroom…teacher educators should challenge student teachers to reflect upon how to behave and act in the RE classroom… (S64)

> …Role-plays focusing on the possible challenges we will eventually have to face in schools ought to be constructed by teacher educators. Students should take actively part in these role-plays, followed by whole class discussions. Examples are to be taken from current issues and problems related to the practice of religions in the present world, nationally and internationally… (S38)

> …Teacher educators in RE have to familiarise student teachers with various situations, positive and negative, that can occur in the RE lessons. Then a discussion of possible solutions and examples of good practice should be initiated both in small groups and in plenary sessions… (S17)

> …Ethical and moral dilemmas, from current classroom experiences, have to be highlighted by teacher educators, who ought to give good guidance for the best possible handling of these dilemmas… (S24)

These student teachers hold the view that there ought to be more authentic field-based experience in RE. One student teacher argues that because a practice group consists of 3-4 trainees and the practice period is limited, in addition to the few lessons in RE available in schools ‘we don’t get much experience of the teaching of RE’. Some student teachers get no experience at all (S148).They also want to share their particular classroom experiences in plenary sessions:

> …In constructing a course design teacher educators have to give space for student teacher experiences in schools. These experiences should be presented by students and lecturers in co-operation and be the focus of discussions and debates in plenary sessions… (S20)

5.6.3 Skills and competencies of teacher educators related to the RE classroom

The ability of teacher educators in RE to deal constructively and adequately with school experiences seems to be questioned by some respondents:

> …There ought to be more field-based experience in RE. Many of the teacher educators in the department of RE have never worked in a school and have no field based personal experience. Good and real RE teachers ought to be invited to give lectures and share their experience with future students. This would better prepare student teachers for their future professional lives… (S28)

> …Teacher educators should be better educated in pedagogy. The course design of RE has to focus more on pedagogies and develop strategies to prepare us for our future work in the classroom… (S39).

Dissatisfaction with teacher educators is strongly felt when a certain educator makes a school visit to observe classroom teaching. There is an expectation among students that the educator has valuable feedback to offer in the evaluation discussion after the teaching sessions and when this does not happen, the student teacher is surprised and even disappointed. As one student puts it:

> …My school-based experience of RE was good. However, I was disappointed that the teacher educator in RE who came to visit and observe my RE teaching was not able to offer a better support in terms of giving me constructive feedback… (S93)

There is also an expectation among student teachers connected to the motivation to teach RE. They expect teacher educators to inspire them not only to acquire the knowledge of the content of the curriculum, but also inspire them to teach RE for example:

> …The teacher educator in ITE did not give me any inspiration to teach RE… (S118)

5.6.4 The problem of cohesion between RE in ITE and RE in schools

For a teacher educator it is not easy to establish a continuous communication with schools within the present course structure. During the practice period of three weeks s/he has to visit about seven to eight schools where 25-30 students are working as trainees supervised by mentors. Every year there is a change of schools and mentors. This procedure makes it difficult for the teacher educator to keep her/himself updated about the development in various schools.

Ways of developing better co-operation and communication between ITE and schools would remedy this situation. In cases where students were given an opportunity to prepare an RE lesson based on themes and pedagogies which they had studied in the RE course and got some experience of, they felt very satisfied, as they report:

> …The theme of my RE lesson was about Christ through pictures and art. The teaching and learning activities in ITE had given me the confidence I needed to engage in the teaching of this theme… (S27)

> …I was very lucky to have my practice in a multi-cultural classroom and thus I was able to use a lot of the knowledge and experiences I had gained in the RE course in ITE… (S89)

> …I feel that RE opened my eyes to a number of pedagogies that I was able make use of in my school practice… (S81)

5.6.5 Values and attitudes among RE teachers

In the process of educating a good RE teacher, specific attitudes and values seem to be essential:

> …RE courses have to focus on good attitudes and values and raise an awareness of the importance of acting according to these attitudes and values… (S38)

> …It is very important that RE teachers manage to be open and receptive. There is no point in saying something and acting differently… (S41)

> …If you as a teacher intend to promote personal development through RE, you ought to be conscious of your values and attitudes. Your skills in listening to learners and understanding their situations are essential in the process of obtaining these aims… (S4)

5.6.6 The process of learning how to teach RE

Learning how to teach RE is seen as a particular challenge when the topic is other religions: (other religions here means religions other than Christianity; I am as a researcher aware of the biased language used, but have chosen to report the authentic wording of respondents)

> …There ought to be a particular emphasis on the process of how to teach and deal with other religions appropriately… (S16)

5.6.7 The challenge of attuning to learners' needs

Many respondents emphasise the importance of learner-oriented approaches in the teaching and learning activities of RE. This awareness has to be initiated in ITE and emphasised by teacher educators. S125 is concerned with this topic:

> …Teacher educators have to demonstrate how we can attune to learners needs in RE lessons. Authentic experiences of doing this have to be constructed… (S125)

5.6.8 RE as a multi-cultural and multi-faith meeting place

Several respondents, as can be seen in the following quotations,+ mention the importance of meeting practitioners of various religions other than Christianity:

> …It is important to meet practitioners of other religions and not only focus on the traditions and stories of these religions… (S12)

> …Give student teachers opportunities to experience how the religions we are studying in the course modules are practiced. This can be done by organising study tours and excursions… (S7)

> …As our society is becoming more and more multicultural a visit to a multi-cultural school ought to be a compulsory part of the RE programme… (S19)

5.6.9 Learning from the perspective of student teachers

Learning is the aim of all education. In all communities of learning it is important to know how the learner perceives the learning process and thus devise ways of working and pedagogies appropriate for a successful learning. The importance of the learner's being seen and listened to is acknowledged by student teachers in this way:

> …Teacher educators have to listen to student teachers and take their needs and wishes seriously. If this were the case the course design would have been more student-oriented with creative activities to stimulate learning from our perspective… (S44)

> …Teacher educators have to attune to student teachers' needs and develop caring relationship where learners are challenged to reflect in depth, upon personal values and experiences related to religious belief and faith… (S150)

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reported on the activities, intervention, data collection and analysis which I made as part of my first action research cycle in order to explore the views of student teachers who had successfully completed the RE course. As I needed to gain more knowledge of the actual situation of educating teachers for RE in Norway, I conducted a survey based on a questionnaire in two ITE colleges in Bergen. The responses from the four parts of this questionnaire seem to elicit some important issues related to the quality of the education of future RE teachers. The problem of cohesion between the RE module designed within ITE in the college and school-based experience has been explored. The findings reveal essential expectations from student teachers and point to relevant measures and changes to be considered and implemented to meet these expectations.

The lack of experience of classroom teaching of RE is alarming and calls for a revision of the organisation of practice. The variety of mentoring skills and competence does not seem to meet the educational needs of student teachers, who have very little or no experience of constructing teaching and learning activities in RE. An ideal practice in these circumstances would be a mentor-trainee relationship where mentors were able to share a variety of methods and approaches to teaching and learning. Based on the findings from the survey, I was encouraged to implement another intervention of SOL by means of the Learning Conversation, which I judged

could offer an appropriate and effective tool to remedy the problem of cohesion between teaching and learning in the college and authentic classroom activities and experiences. It could also establish an improved working relationship between student teachers and mentors in which they could develop supportive and caring interactions. In the reading of this chapter it is necessary to bear in mind that the language of the survey was Norwegian and was subsequently translated into English.

CHAPTER 6

THE SECOND ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the actions which I planned and carried out in my second action research cycle. These actions emerged from my first AR cycle which revealed the efficiency and appropriateness of the PCP techniques, particularly the approach of SOL conceptualized in the Learning Conversation and from the knowledge and insight which I gained from the survey reported in Chapter 5. The findings from this survey indicated that there was a need to strengthen student teacher/mentor interactions. I anticipated that the experience of processing the LC would have this effect.

Because of the new organisation of school-based practice, which was implemented in the study year following the first action research cycle, mentors could no longer work on a personal contract. The college wanted whole school contracts in order to improve the status of schools as training schools or practice schools for Bergen University College. Accordingly, I could not extend my initial plan to continue my interventional work with mentors who had taken part in the first LC experiment.

Only one of the team of seven mentors could continue working with me and taking part in a second intervention of LC, as she works in a school which had the status of a practice school for this study year. Fortunately, this mentor was the team leader and a very experienced teacher/mentor, who was able to give valuable inputs and share her expertise with me.

6.2 A new plan forward

I order to move on in my enquiry, I spent some time reflecting upon a fresh plan forward. In this process I had an informal conversation with my critical friend Anna whose school was not a practice school and therefore she would not work as a mentor in this particular academic year. Our main challenge was to envisage a plan for action which could provide the necessary skills for student teachers and mentors to process the LC as we had learnt from the first cycle that some training is needed in order to engage successfully in the this process.

As the LC is derived from the theory of Self-Organised Learning (SOL), we wanted to gain a better understanding of what SOL was and how it can be explained to learners.
Our question was: What does it mean to be self-organised?
Harri- Augstein and Thomas (1991) claim the following:

> …Self-Organisation consists of the ability to converse with oneself about one's own learning processes and to observe, search, analyse, formulate, review, judge, decide and act on the basis of such encounters...
>
> (Harri-Augstein and Thomas, 1991)

These authors argue that the learning conversation is a tool which promotes this self-organisation. In order to be able to carry out this conversation effectively, some help and training are needed.

Accordingly, the planning team agreed that we needed to renew our skills of processing the learning conversation by organising a new workshop, led by Dr.Paul Timmins at the beginning of the study year. The work that was initiated in this introductory phase was then continued in

team meetings with mentors and student teachers before their school practice. We experienced that both mentors and student teachers showed a high degree of positive interest in processing LC, and all of them agreed to participate in the second LC experiment. Accordingly, we decided to implement this process for mentor-student teachers' school-based interactions with the purpose of gaining more insight into the effectiveness of this tool. As the cohort in the first LC experiment was quite small, we were now able to extend the number of participants.

This second intervention of the LC process was carried out during the academic year 2003/2004. Student teachers participating were all in their second year of ITE at Bergen University College in which religious education is one of the main compulsory subjects.

6.3 Participants and research instruments

As I was accorded study leave in this particular study year, I co-operated with a colleague who agreed to participate in the experiment and give me some time from his RE course to introduce his student teachers to the PCP theory and approach. In order to establish some relationship with these students, whom I did not know, I introduced them to the Salmon Line assessment (Salmon and Clare, 1984), which we used as a first tool to explore essential qualities and skills of a good RE teacher. This activity was linked to the question of how teachers develop autonomy and learn to become self-organised.

Then we had two sessions of focusing on SOL and how to process the LC. I introduced the student teachers to the ideas of Harri-Augustein and Thomas, discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis and then the students took on the roles of learners and learning coaches.
These activities were created in order to prepare these student teachers for the LC experiment.

The total number of student teachers in this group was 24, of whom 22 agreed to be interviewed after the experience of SOL/LC in schools. The 2 students who refused to take part in the interviews did not explain why. I assumed that since this activity was new to them, they felt inept to share their experience after a first trial of the LC.

The Salmon Line activity took place in the college. From the group of 24 participants, 21 allowed me to use their completed SL and LC formats in the present study. The following table provides an overview of the research instruments and the samples collected from the participants in the main SOL/LC intervention of the study:

research instruments	**number of samples**
Salmon Line (SL) completed formats	20
Learning Conversations (LC) completed formats	21
Interviews	22

Table 6-1: Research instruments and samples

At this point of my study, my assumption was that by implementing this alternative teaching and learning practice, I would be able to answer my research questions, first introduced in 1.11:

1. What effects would an alternative teaching and learning practice, based on Self- Organised Learning and the process of LCs have on the professional and personal development of a group of student teachers?
    a. Would the student teachers be able to assume greater control over their personal development?
    b. Would the student teachers be able by means of this approach to find their own strengths and weaknesses and thereby find their own authentic voice as teachers?
    c. What might be the barriers to mentors and student teachers in implementing this alternative approach in schools?

2. What affect would an alternative approach to the mentoring of a group of student teachers have on their process of becoming teachers in general and RE teachers in particular?
3. What changes would I need to make in my practice as a teacher educator in order to promote active participation in this alternative practice among groups of student teachers and mentors?

6.3.1 Theoretical perspectives

The theory of George Kelly (1963) seems to be appropriate when a researcher wants to explore the inner life and personal needs and development of people in a particular context. In the context of ITE, I wanted to elicit student teachers' views about the RE teacher and how they see and evaluate themselves when it comes to personal qualifications and the ability to carry out the tasks and challenges of a good RE teacher. I assumed that initiating a process of reflection about personal qualifications, values and beliefs, abilities and potential in doing the job as a teacher, would lead to an awareness of self and strategies for personal development might be the result. Thus their LC activity could be informed.

In this respect the individual concepts, the patterns of our make-up are, according to Kelly (1963), the keys to changing old patterns. In a professional development as in ITE, knowledge about personal constructs are essential for the creation of alternative constructs which might enable people to develop attitudes and actions appropriate for what they want to achieve. I anticipated that the PSO activity in the LC process could facilitate this development among future teachers.

I was also inspired by recent developments within positive psychology, particularly the work of Maddux (2002), who introduced me to the concept of self-efficacy defined as 'the power of believing you can'. In discussing the recipe for success, this author claims that:

> …Believing that you can accomplish what you want to accomplish is one of the most important ingredients-perhaps the most important ingredient-in the recipe for success…
> (Maddux, 2002: 277)

Maddux claims that the concept of self-efficiency was introduced by Albert Bandura in a Psychological Review article titled 'Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behaviour Change', (1997) cited in Maddux (2002: 277). Self-efficacy theory argues that efficacy beliefs play a crucial role in psychological adjustments, psychological problems, and physical health, as well as professionally guided and self-guided behavioural change strategies (Maddux, 2002: 277).

At this point of my study I found that this concept was a fruitful addition to my theoretical reflection about the efficiency of SOL and my ideas about teaching and learning as a whole-person phenomenon. As I believe that teaching is a profession where one has to be constantly prepared for the unprepared, I felt sympathetic to the concept of self-efficacy as Maddux explains it, for he underlines that 'self-efficacy' is what I believe I can do with my skills under certain conditions and further:

> …It is concerned not with my beliefs about my ability to perform specific and trivial motor acts but my beliefs about my ability to co-ordinate and orchestrate skills and abilities in changing and challenging situations…(Maddux, 2002: 278)

This concept is about what an individual believes that s/he can do in a specific context. I assumed that the PCP techniques chosen would promote beliefs about self-efficacy in the context of a classroom, inspiring the student teachers to develop themselves by trusting their own abilities and skills. Zimmerman (2000) claims that self-efficacy during the last two decades has merged as a highly effective predictor of students' motivation and learning. I will elaborate this argument in my last thesis chapter, Chapter 8.

The assumption of self-efficacy as an effective predictor for learning has been sustained by several research projects about optimal learning, motivation and personal development. My aim was to enhance both my own learning and the learning of student teachers. Lambert and McCombs (1997) defined Learner-Centred Principles as follows:

- create positive interpersonal relationships
- honour the student voice
- stimulate higher order thinking and
- cater for students' individual differences

Assuming that my research instruments could in some ways meet these learner-centred principles, I also decided to try to keep these four principles as my personal guidelines not only in my research but also in my own professional practice.

6.4 The Salmon Line elicitation about the RE teacher

In order to honour the student teachers' voice I decided to adopt the Salmon Line technique derived from Salmon and Clare (1984) as a first elicitation of their personal views. Consequently I composed a Salmon Line task containing the following two questions:

1. Describe a good RE teacher
2. Describe a bad RE teacher

Then participants were asked to focus on their own skills and competencies by using the Salmon line scale:

3. On this scale from 1-10 where would you place yourself as an RE teacher?

4. What is it about your skills and competencies that place you here?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Table 6-2: Salmon Line Format

I considered the Salmon Line instrument as an appropriate tool for focusing on student teachers' views on two levels. The first level focuses on their personal views of a bad and good RE teacher from a general perspective. Secondly, they are asked to place themselves on a scale from one to ten to illustrate their personal evaluation of their own competencies, skills and suitability for the job and then thirdly they are asked to explain their choices.

As the format was constructed with the purpose of contrasting a bad and a good RE teacher by inviting the participants to evaluate the descriptions on the left and right sides of the handouts above the Salmon Line scale, I have chosen to report the findings that logically can be contrasted as negative and positive in a similar way. Then there are two specific overviews connected to the presentation of a) a bad RE teacher and b) a good RE teacher. The document was created in Norwegian with an explanation of the purpose of the investigation, a guarantee of anonymity, a promise to treat data according to the guiding ethical rules at the School of Education, the University of Birmingham and participants' rights not to participate.

I introduced the student teachers personally to the task and collected the formulas. The analysis was done manually, identifying recurrent themes.

The following table reports on these students' views of what constitutes respectively a bad and a good RE teacher.

Concepts	**A bad RE teacher**	**Concepts**	**A good RE teacher**
lack of knowledge	11	knowledgeable	16
instructor	12	educator	8
lack of respect	7	respectful	9
intolerant	9	tolerant	6
disengaged	3	engaged	4

Table 6-3: Student teachers' views on a bad and a good RE teacher

6.4.1 Description of a bad RE teacher

According to the views of these student teachers a bad RE teacher is an instructor who has a lack of knowledge, is disengaged in the subject area, and demonstrates signs of intolerance and lack of respect towards religious views and world views. Many students underline the importance of treating learners from minority religious backgrounds inclusively and with respect.

6.4.2 Description of a good RE teacher

A good RE teacher is, in contrast, a knowledgeable educator who is able to demonstrate his engagement in RE and has an attitude of tolerance and respect regardless of the religious views or non religious views of the learners. These qualifications are ones mentioned most often by the twenty respondents. There are, however, other views expressed by some of them.

These views will be reported in the following two tables, showing first a bad RE teacher and then a good RE teacher.

6.4.3 Specific lack of competence and negative attitude attributed to a bad RE teacher

The variety of opinions and views about a bad RE teacher can be seen in the following table:

concepts	**frequency**
too focused on personal religious views	3
not well prepared for lessons	3
lacking knowledge of students' religious identity	3
lacking knowledge of how to teach RE adequately	3
inattentive to religious diversity in her/his teaching and learning approaches	3
lacking contact with parents	2
lacking reflection	2
lacking creativity in teaching and learning approaches	2
poor at communicating well with parents	2
biased	2
lacking creativity	2
often prejudiced	2
dishonest	1
lacking pedagogical skills and reflection	1
stuck in the old confessional form of RE and unable to face the challenge of the new multi-faith subject	1
unable to see the world from the perspective of others	1
presenting own religious view as the only true one (bigoted)	1
biased in his pedagogical attitude	1

Table 6-4: Descriptions attributed to a bad RE teacher

The diversity of these descriptions might indicate that the respondents have some experience from observing teaching and learning activities in RE which did not quite answer their personal ideas of how a multi-faith programme in RE ought to be created in the classroom. It could also be assumed that they might have picked this up from their education in the college.

6.4.4 Skills and attitudes attributed to a good RE teacher

The following table presents the attributes of a good RE teacher:

concepts	**frequency**
reflective	7
good at communicating with parents	7
creative	3
skilled at composing diverse pedagogies	3
well acquainted with every learner	3
well prepared	2
has sufficient knowledge about religions and worldviews among learners to never 'thread on somebody's feet'	2
able to stimulate learning and interest	2
caring in attitude	1
able to interact well with pupils and parents	1
a good storyteller	1
a good listener	1
open towards different views	1
positive in attitude	1
honest	1
respectful of the religious practice of learners	1
pedagically skilled to a high level	1
able to show appreciation of pupils in interaction with them	1
open to all kinds of questions from pupils	1
empathetic	1
holding good values	1

Table 6-5: Description of a good RE teacher

The findings in this table demonstrate a clear understanding that a good RE teacher has to be reflective and able to communicate well with parents as 14 responses listed these attributes. As RE is a compulsory subject in Norway with a limited possibility of exemption from the religious activities which are opposed to one's own religious practice and belief, parents have to be well

informed in order to have sufficient knowledge of the content of RE lessons and the way in which RE teachers deal with religious and cultural diversity among pupils. Consequently this message is strongly emphasised in official documents and curricula of RE and presumably it has been picked up by students as this table reveals.

6.5 Student teachers' explanations of their position on the Salmon Line

After having described a bad and a good RE teacher, student teachers were asked to consider their own competences in the light of their description and then to give a reason for their assessment. The following table shows the choices available to them and how they assessed themselves:

6.5.1 Salmon Line rating scale of student teachers competence

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
	2	1		5	7	4	1		

Table 6-6: Personal assessment of RE competence

This personal evaluation shows that only the scale from 2-8 is used, leaving the lowest and the two highest points 9 and 10 unused. A table taking this result into consideration on an increasing scale appears as follows:

Number on salmon line	**frequency**
6	7
5	5
7	4
2	2
3	1
8	1

Table 6-7: Distribution of personal assessment

7 student teachers of the cohort of 20 placed themselves in column 6, 5 in 5, 4 in 7, 2 in 2 and for 3 and 8, 1 each. Their arguments and reasons for these choices will be reported accordingly.

6.5.2 Reasons for student teachers rating themselves at 6

Among the 7 students rating themselves at 6, 6 students give their reasons while 1 student does not give any explanation. There seems to be a tendency among the respondents to evaluate their ability to teach RE in the light of a holistic perception of themselves as teachers in general. Their personal abilities, attitudes, skills and knowledge for fulfilling the role and meeting challenges of teaching will accordingly serve as underpinning reasons in this task. These are the arguments given:

> …The reason why I place myself on 6 is that I believe to exhibit most of the personal positive qualifications necessary for a teacher. I have had experience that I can communicate easily with children and young people. On the other hand, I lack knowledge, particularly in RE to rate myself on a higher level, but this is something I think is easy to remedy… (S15)

Lack of sufficient knowledge in the subject area of RE is felt among other students:

> …I don’t have sufficient knowledge about other religions [sc. other than Christianity]. I do feel however that I can place myself above average because I am open towards other religions, I don’t have many prejudices and I think I am able to convey good values to children and young people… (S20)

Considering that these students took part in the current investigation after having attended two and a half months of the compulsory RE course of ten months, it is understandable that they do not feel that they have acquired sufficient knowledge to teach RE. As there is a general understanding that knowledge is important for doing a good job as an RE teacher, lack of

knowledge will accordingly influence personal feelings of competence. Even if the lack of knowledge in RE is widely felt, however, some student teachers feel that specific personal abilities are valuable assets in fulfilling the tasks and challenges of a good RE teacher, as stated in the following:

> …The reason for rating myself at 6 is that I consider myself to be quite tolerant towards most religions and worldviews and take a lot of interest in RE topics. I am in the process of building up my knowledge competence in order to have a good overview of all religions. I consider knowledge to be of great importance… (S10)

Only one of these student teachers starts with a positive declaration of his/her own knowledge acquisition in this way:

> …I have relatively good knowledge in RE and consider myself to be open and able to teach all RE topics objectively. My particular challenge as a teacher is to develop my skills in becoming a good leader of my class. Here I have to better myself, definitely… (S18)

Another student starts with her/his teaching ability and then sees RE in light of this general perspective:

> …I think I am capable of stimulating learning and interest for any subject that I'll have to teach. For the teaching and learning of RE, I believe that I'll manage to convey a neutral standpoint when dealing with any topic in religions and worldviews… (S7)

Personal abilities appropriate for the teaching of the subject areas of RE is described by one student teacher in this way:

> …I consider myself to exhibit important abilities such as empathy and engagement along with being a good storyteller. My level of knowledge in RE is broad, as I am generally well informed. I admit to lacking depth of knowledge, but I am reflective and like to address philosophical questions… (S1)

These quotations reveal that student teachers have clear opinions about their own personal capacity and ability to face the tasks and challenges of an RE teacher. Knowledge and skills, along with personal qualities, are necessary components in this scenario.

6.5.3 Reasons for student teachers rating themselves at 5

Six students feel that they have sufficient knowledge and skills in RE to place themselves at 5, which is in the middle of the scale. All these six students give an explanation for their choice. They share the feeling of having too little experience in the teaching of RE to rate themselves higher. All of them are very realistic about their level of knowledge and underline the fact that more knowledge is necessary in order to be a good RE teacher. Even if they have a limited experience of teaching RE in schools they have the experience of teaching other subjects and know what constitutes the practice of a good teacher in general. In addition they claim to be fully aware of the specific challenges to teach RE constructively and know what tasks they have to face in their personal transformation into a good RE teacher. These student teachers seem to have a realistic self-image, combined with a strong determination to do better.

The image of a good RE teacher which these student teachers share seem to be congruent with the description of a good RE teacher in Table 6.5.

6.5.4 Reasons for student teachers rating themselves at 7

Four student teachers evaluated their qualifications as RE teachers at 7. The reasons they give vary from person to person. One of them is a Christian and feels this as an obstacle to fulfilling all the requirements of the curriculum when it comes to neutrality and objectivity in dealing with religious topics (S12). Student 16, however, regards his/her objective views of religions as a strength as s/he argues:

> …I regard the fact that I am no strong believer of any religious faith to be an asset in my work as an RE teacher… (S16)

In a way this argument supports the feeling S12 expresses about a strong faith being an obstacle for an RE teacher. The argument given by S16 is also put forward by another student, S5 who states that his lack of a strong religious faith will help him in teaching all religions without any prejudice.

The fourth student feels a lack of knowledge and skills in the experience of teaching RE. Nevertheless, s/he considers her/his general competences to be adequate and a basis for personal development expressed thus:

> …I am very good at being fair and observing the needs of other people. Hence I am able to protect everybody's rights, and prevent discriminative acts from occurring. By my inclusive behaviour nobody will feel excluded and an atmosphere of justice will prevail… (S4)

This student obviously has a general experience of teaching. S/he explains that the reason why s/he did not rate her/himself higher was a lack of experience in interacting with parents from minority groups.

6.5.5 Reasons for student teachers rating themselves at 3 and 2

Two student teachers rate themselves at 2 and one at 3. Their arguments are quite similar. The lack of knowledge and skills is a common concern. Student 11, who rates her/his competence at 3, openly declares her/his level of knowledge in RE to be poor, while her/his self-esteem is quite positive:

> …I am an open person who can deal with diversity, and capable of adjusting to unexpected events in the classroom. I am no instructor… (S11)

6.5.6 Reasons for rating at 8

Only one respondent rated him/herself at 8, which was the highest score chosen. S/he does not give a very long explanation but expresses hope and beliefs in his/her personal ability to be a good RE teacher. The description is as follows:

> …A good RE teacher is someone with a lot of knowledge who in her/his behaviour demonstrates tolerance and respect, does not instruct and is neutral in dealing with all RE topics. I do hope to exhibit these abilities… (S19).

From this answer, it can be assumed that this student teacher does not actually know by experience that s/he possesses these qualifications. These are hopes and assumptions and have to be understood as such.

6.5.7 Conclusion

The respondents in this part of the study reveal a high level of self-knowledge. Judging from their answers, they are reflective about their own potential to meet the challenges of an RE

teacher successfully. Even if there is an obvious lack of experience, the respondents demonstrate a confident attitude towards their own professional life.

6.6 Implementation of LC in the second cycle

6.6.1 Introduction

Based on the experience of the first LC intervention, the Norwegian language used in the LC formula had to be used more carefully in order to avoid misunderstandings of the procedure (see Appendices 2a-b and 3a-b). The main reason was that student teachers had problems in understanding what they were asked to do. Hence the instruction had to be more specific, particularly in the evaluation box which had to explain more clearly how they should assess the efficiency of the strategy which they had decided to act upon.

A good learning coach could probably have helped the learners/student teachers to reflect constructively upon these challenges. As previously mentioned the task of the coach (mentor) is to guide the learner in this process by asking relevant questions which can stimulate reflection and help the learner to imagine adequate actions to put into practice.

The first AR cycle also revealed the need for both learner and learning coach to gain more experience in order to feel competent to process the LC, since only experienced mentors were able to implement this tool constructively. This is a question of repeated experience. Thomas & Harri-Augstein, the inventors of the technique, recommend five applications of the LC to be sure of mastering the technique successfully.

6.6.2 Preparing for a second LC implementation

Because of the change in the organisation of school practice, as explained earlier, only one of the experienced LC mentors remained for the main study intervention. Fortunately, she was the team leader and agreed to share her experience from the first LC experiment with the six new mentors. She also agreed to try to motivate them to make use of LC as a tool for mentor-student teacher co-operation.

Bearing in mind the difficulties experienced by the five mentors in the first LC intervention, something which had discouraged them from processing it, I decided to concentrate on student teachers this time by giving them some training in the use of LC.

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For the purpose of training the student teachers I composed an LC course, consisting of two parts, which I organised a few weeks before their practice period. In the first part we started with the Salmon Line activity and in the second they were introduced to the SOL/ LC procedure. The participants used the LC formulas and acted out the roles of a learner and a learning coach, imagining the authentic mentor-student teacher relationship in the context of their field-based school practice. This activity was carried out twice with the purpose of gaining some experience in both roles.

At the end of this session they were given a new LC pro forma which they were asked to start filling in by writing down the learning task on which they wanted to focus during the coming practice period and also to write down some strategies which they wanted to use in achieving their aims.

For the mentors only a brief introduction to the LC procedure was given in a regular team meeting organised to prepare student teachers' school practice. This is a compulsory activity with the

presence of teacher educators and mentors and one representative from the students. In this meeting, lasting for about 2 hours, I presented the LC training course which I had carried out with the students and introduced the mentors to the LC process and gave them the LC formats. The team leader, the only mentor with LC experience, also shared her experience with these mentors and strongly recommended them to implement this tool. As a result all of them agreed to make use of the LC and expressed positive views about the initiative taken to structure mentor-student teacher interactions. As these mentors knew the students from the previous practice period, I assumed that they were capable of providing a framework in which LC could be used.

6.6.3 Analysis of LC formulas

This practice period lasted for 3 weeks. There was no time or occasion for me to visit these students during this period as this was the task of my colleague who was their RE teacher educator. After this period I started the gathering of data. I interviewed 22 student teachers and asked them if they were willing to let me use their LC formulas for my study.

I made it clear to them that they were totally free to keep these private as it is understood that an individual conversation with a mentor is confidential and private and should not be made known without the consent of the student teacher.

I was quite happy that as many as 21 of these student teachers had no problems about giving me their formula. My first interest was to find out what particular learning task or tasks they had chosen and what strategies they envisaged in order to achieve their aims. The nature of appropriate learning tasks had been an issue debated in the second part of the LC course which these student teachers had participated in. There was a general agreement that they had to review

previous evaluation reports particularly the last one from the previous practice period, in order to connect to what they had already achieved and then go further in their personal development.

6.6.4 The first LC determining essential learning tasks and learning strategies

The following two tables will give an overview of the learning tasks and what strategies these student teachers wanted to apply. These data are all taken from what the respondents wrote in their formats. Experienced educators would probably object to how these respondents describe their strategies in relation to their learning tasks. In this connection it has to be underlined that these students are in their 2nd year of ITE and have very little authentic classroom experience. For me as a researcher I wanted to report their views as accurate as possible.

task	**frequency**	**strategy**
classroom management	12	I will focus on classroom management in RE, by applying various constructive teaching and learning approaches (S6) Prepare lessons well and try to justify my choice of pedagogies by consulting L97 (the national curriculum) (S5) Try to develop good routines for classroom work (S3) By getting more experience while being the only teacher responsible for lessons (S4) Give clear and understandable instruction by using my authority and try to be fair but firm in my interactions with pupils (S18) I will test my authority by using my voice in a constructive way and try to demonstrate a determined body language (S20) Believe in my own ability and plan my lessons with my purposes in mind, try out a diversity of teaching and learning activities (S17) Use all pupils names and ask myself by the end of the school day if I have seen, confirmed and used the names of all pupils (S14)
Learn about and develop different teaching and learning activities and put them into practice.	4	By observing pedagogies applied by the mentor and ask relevant questions to get a deeper understanding of the underpinning theories of actual approaches (S1)

		Observe and respond to pupils' needs and be come aware of how I use my voice (S9) Observe pupils' needs and respond to them (S10) I want to depart form the traditional transmittance of knowledge teaching style and try out alternatives to the blackboard approach (S18).
Learn more about pedagogies related to portfolios	2	Learn about and implement this approach in the classroom (S2)
Create a positive learning environment	2	Establish good contact with pupils by using dialogues (S7)
Put the new curriculum of 1997 into action	1	Make use of songs and games as learning activities and elicit pupils' views about these activities (S12)

Table 6-8: Student teachers' learning tasks and strategies

6.6.5 'How will you judge your success?'

The last step in the LC procedure is to find out how people judge their success.

The responses to this question can be structured in the following way:

Feedback from mentor and classmates	My own judgement	Reactions and feedback from pupils
12	5	3

Table 6-9: Criteria for judging personal success

As can be seen from this table more than half of these student teachers rely on the feedback of mentors and classmates to judge their success in the classroom. Nevertheless, as many as five would use their own judgement and three would involve pupils in this assessment.

6.7 Review of the LC with mentors

The second student teacher-mentor conversation took place after two weeks' practice experience and had the following structure based on three questions:

Did you fulfil your aims?	None of the student teachers are convinced that they were able to satisfy their aims fully, but all of them report of personal progress and about being in a process which should lead to their aims.
What did you do?	All respondents found the strategies written down in the LC important for what they did with the pupils. Due to various circumstances, they were not always able to do what they intended to do. For many this was a very good learning experience.
How well did you do it?	11 respondents feel that they did very well 6 did their best 3 felt that because of LC they became more observant both to their own performance and their pupils' reactions 1 did not fill in this box

Table 6-10: Responses to the review of the LC process

The analysis of the 21 responses to the second LC process left me with the impression that the limited time of 2 to 3 weeks' teaching experience was an obstacle to achieving the predefined aims. The planning of the period and the commitment to what had been decided and written down in the LC formulas, however, promoted a feeling of control and increased the quality of the experience. I base this impression on some of the responses from the formats as follows:

> …I did not fulfil my aims but I feel I have started a process in which I will eventually reach these aims… (S18)

> …I want to continue this process in my next practice period… (S15)

> …I feel that I am on the right road. My insight and knowledge of pedagogies have increased… (S6)

> …I really learnt a lot about portfolio approaches which means that I took part in it… (S2)

> …Compared to my previous practice period I did better but I have still a long way to go… (S4)

The feeling of taking part in a constructive process is shared by these student teachers. It is a positive feeling which they want to develop in new practice periods. These answers left me feeling contented; none of these respondents had claimed to have actually done what they had proposed but most of them were left with the conviction that they were travelling towards their aims. Perhaps being a good teacher is to pursue a continuous personal development towards aims which will never be reached.

6.7.1 Describing the differences between plans and actions

The challenge of reflecting upon and putting into words the differences between planned activities and what could be done in the classroom with pupils seems to be rather difficult for many of these student teachers. Five of the cohort of 21 did not give any explanations at all and left this box of the pro forma open, 4 explain that they did not fully implement what they wanted to do. These four describe this practice period as a positive experience where the pupils behaved well and they felt respected and able to do their best in the classroom.

Five others were disappointed with the pupils' behaviour and had to spend more time than expected on calming them down and getting their attention. Of the 7 remaining, 5 report a process of personal development in which they felt quite insecure at first and then gradually became more confident. Two of these 7 respondents felt that time was a problem as they consider a two-week period too short to put into practice what they had planned.
Even though the framework was not optimal, there seemed to be among the sixteen student teachers, who described their experiences, a feeling of being able to develop themselves

professionally and personally. This impression was sustained by their self-assessment about strengths and weaknesses.

6.7.2 Assessing the learning processes from the perspective of strengths and weaknesses

From previous experience with processing the LC, student teachers might feel reluctant to talk about their strengths and weaknesses. The first AR cycle revealed that it was easier to talk about weaknesses than strengths and both mentors and student teachers talked about the need to have sufficient time for this reflection (see Chapter 4).

In this second cycle, 10 participants did not share these perspectives with me in their pro formats. 11 respondents, however, did give me some valuable information about their personal views in this written form.

Starting from a feeling of inadequacy, 3 student teachers felt that they were too artificial in their interactions with pupils and all had a feeling of acting out the role of a teacher but not actually being one. These three student teachers describe their strength to be quite similar, seeing their ability to be reflective and conscious about what they do and how they behave as their main strength.

At this point of my analysis, I needed to provide an overview of this self-assessment activity:

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Creative Musical Likes art and crafts Engaged and gets the attention from all pupils I am able to create a calm and good atmosphere in the classroom I create a variety of teaching approaches My lessons are well planned and carried out I am a fair and caring person I am able to include all pupils I am able to motivate and engage learners	Unclear in giving instructions My planning for lessons was not sufficient My body language and my voice are not varied enough I demand too much from myself I work too hard and therefore I am afraid of getting a burn-out syndrome I feel very incompetent in dealing with difficult pupils I talk too much and too loudly which I consider an obstacle for pupils' oral activities Too quickly I become the leader of a group I may sometimes be too intense

I am good at preparing myself I am determined but fair I am reflective and able to have an external view of myself My assets: engagement, guts, humour, involvement, I like to be a teacher, strong in science, reflective, and able to see my pupils as I am very interested in them and therefore I establish close relationship with them I am a good story teller, as I am able to get the attention from all pupils. When I talk to them, they become engaged I am relaxed and feel comfortable bending down and get eye contact with small children	As a male I find it easier to establish relationships with boys and I am aware of the fact that I might not see girls who are 'invisible' I am challenged by combining authority and respect with my regard for equality in teacher-pupil relationship I do not manage to keep pupils quiet when they work on their own I do not manage to calm down all pupils, I need several attempts to get everybody's attention, I feel that there is a lack of respect

Table 6-11: Table of student teachers' strengths and weaknesses

Considering that these student teachers are in their second year of the four-year teacher education programme, their self-awareness and reflection cover essential aspects of what a teacher needs to be good at and what challenges to face in the classroom. In authentic teacher-pupil interactions they were faced with the challenge of putting into practice their beliefs and values. Sometimes they feel successful and sometimes they experience shortcomings and failure. The LC process offered a tool to reflect about these experiences and frame them in words.

6.8 Sharing the LC experience in interviews

6.8.1 Introduction

The last step in the second RE cycle was to interview the teacher students who were taking part in the experiment. These interviews were carried out as soon as possible after their practice period in November 2003. Because of the timing of their exams which took place in December, the interviews took place in early January of the following term (academic year 2003/2004).

The processing of SOL by means of the learning conversation took place in an already existing structure: that of interaction between mentor and student teachers. In the way that it was implemented in this study it represented an alternative approach to traditional interactions

between them. Even if professional conversations between student teachers and mentors had taken place before, these conversations had not been processed by a structured pro forma defining PSO and in which a whole cohort of student teachers and mentors had participated. Hence, as a researcher, I wanted to explore the experience of this alternative approach to student teacher-mentor interactions.

Twelve female students and ten male students participated in the interviews. They took place in my office and were recorded, transcribed and sent to the interviewees for comments, corrections and consent. All participants were informed about ethical considerations such as a guarantee of anonymity, observance of good research practice and their right to withdraw or not participate. The interviews can be described as semi-structured with some predetermined questions such as the question about their LC experience, the relationship with mentors and peers. They were all informed about this schedule before the interview started, but I also told them that we might elaborate important issues of relevance to the questions.

6.8.2 Student teachers' experience of the implementation of the Learning Conversation

Interview question:

IQ2: Could you please tell me about your LC experience?

The following table will report on the various views of the participants:

S T	Views
001	I found that I was better prepared for my practice period because I had defined my learning task and this made me more reflective about the whole process
002	The benefit of LC is that you have to define and write down your learning task. You become more reflective and by sharing this task with your mentor and classmates, they all know what you want to develop and achieve.
003	I found it very useful to fill in the LC format because it made me reflect upon my aims and then I could talk with the mentor about them.

004	I found the LC very useful. My main problem from the previous year was the way I use my voice. I speak too fast and articulate badly. I tried to do something with this problem.
005	Since I didn't have any experience with LC, I thought that I had to look at the report from my previous practice period and the feedback that the mentor from this period gave me. My challenge was to create more coherence between L97, the National Curriculum and my teaching approaches.
006	I found the use of the LC format very difficult because my mentor didn't give me any support.
007	At first I found the LC process difficult to use, but my mentor supported me and then I was able to define my aims. This was a problem because I had so many aims.
008	I found LC useful for my definition of aims. I wrote down several aims and that was good.
009	I defined some aims and we talked about it later. I focused on things my previous mentor had come up with.
010	I like the LC process because there are so many things you have to face in a practice period and it was good to concentrate on some of them and write them down so they became concrete. I focused on learning tasks that had emerged from the previous practice period
011	My mentor had no experience with the LC process. She used another format which she found more useful. I had to persuade her to look at the LC format.
012	I only used the LC format the last week. I filled in the format and discussed it with my mentor. It was OK.
013	I used the LC format to define my most essential aims to focus on pedagogical needs during a lesson. I also focused on how I used my voice.
014	LC was useful for defining my own learning task and the strategy to apply.
015	I can't say that LC made any difference compared to my previous practice period.
016	I found LC very useful, because I could focus on my defined aim. I attended ITE in Tromsø the first year and was satisfied with my field-based experience there, even if we didn't use LC.
017	I liked to use the LC format. I could define both aims and strategies. I became more focused and reflective.
018	I didn't use LC very much but I did fill in my learning task and strategy and kept this in my mind and thought about it.
019	I used LC but as I am quite apt to evaluate myself, I do know when I am good and when I've failed.
020	The benefit of using LC is that you can define special issues and focus on them.
021	I found that LC made me more reflective about the whole process.
022	I found that I became more reflective and focused on my learning tasks which emerged from my previous practice. I can't say that LC actually influenced the results but I thought more about the process than I hade done before.

Table 6-12: Student teachers' LC experiences

Given the limited training in implementing the learning conversation, most of these students seem to have benefited from the experience in one way or another. One student, 015 has a negative view of the experience. A more elaborated analysis of the ways in which they have been influenced by this tool classifies their experiences into three main categories:

1. influential: 001, 002, 003, 004, 007, 008, 010, 014, 016, 017, 018, 019, 020, 021, 022
2. not very influential: 005, 012, 013
3. not influential at all:006, 011, 015

I found it particularly interesting to explore how the LC experiment had influenced these students and why it had not had this effect.

6.8.3 The LC process influenced the learning process

There is a clear tendency in these answers to indicate that LC is useful and promotes reflection. 15 of the respondents express this in various ways, for example respondent 002:

> … The benefit of LC is that you have to define and write down your learning task. You become more reflective and by sharing this task with your mentor and classmates, they all know what you want to develop and achieve…

5 of the respondents explicitly say that LC made them more reflective. The main benefit, however, is the commitment made by writing down the learning task, strategy and possible outcome. 10 of the respondents mention that by defining the learning task in this written form, they become more focused on what they want to do and achieve. For young trainees without much classroom experience, it seems to be useful to define some essential tasks and concentrate on them as expressed by respondent 010:

> …I like the LC process because there are so many things you have to face in a practice period and it was good to concentrate on some of them and write them down so they became concrete. I focused on the learning tasks that emerged from the previous practice period…

The LC process serves, according to 010, as a vehicle for promoting coherence in the trainees' personal development. The process of defining a learning task evokes previous practice experience and the areas which each one has to analyse and try to improve in the development of their teaching skills.

6.8.4 The LC process was not very influential

Six respondents expressed no positive experience of LC but merely described how they had used it such as 005:

> ..Since I didn't have any experience with LC, I thought that I had to look at the report from my previous practice period and the feedback that the mentor from this period gave me. My challenge was to create more coherence between L97, the National Curriculum, and my teaching approaches…

The lack of experience was for 005 a reason to turn to the experience of previous practice and the feedback from the mentor at that time. The same procedure is expressed by other respondents in this category such as 009:

> …I defined some aims and we talked about it later. I focused on things my previous mentor had come up with…

The same process is expressed by respondent 013 in the following way:

> …I used the LC format to define my most essential aims and to focus on pedagogical needs during a lesson. I also focused on how I used my voice…

These examples do not indicate whether or not the trainees had benefited from the LC process. It is, however, impossible to conclude that they did not benefit simply because they do not say so. As a researcher I asked myself if they would have been able to do what they had without the help of LC. By reflecting upon this and reading the above quotations several times, I came to the conclusion that the LC process both in this category two and in the first one, makes trainees more aware and reflective about previous experience and motivates them to draw on this

experience to make a link between what they have done and what they should continue to do. In this way they create coherence in their own personal development as teachers.

6.8.5 The LC process was not influential at all

Two respondents express the LC process as a negative experience: student teachers 006 and 007.The main reason for these negative experiences is the lack of mentor support, as trainees, 006 and 011 indicate:

> …I found the use of the LC format very difficult because my mentor didn't give me any support… (006)

and

> ..My mentor had no experience with the LC process. She used another format which she found more useful. I had to persuade her to look at the LC format… (011)

These views clearly underline the relationship between the support of the mentor and the success of processing the LC. This necessary link is expressed by another trainee in the following way:

> …At first I found the LC process difficult but my mentor supported me and then I was able to define my aims… (007)

This view supports the argument of Thomas and Harri-Augstein (1985) that LC processing needs some training in order to be beneficial.

One student 015 did not find that the process of LC made any difference to his previous practice experience.

6.8.6 Conclusion

The use of LC, then, needs some experience in order to define and fill in the PSO, purpose strategy and outcome format. For a trainee without any experience a learning coach is essential for the successful processing of LC. The support of the mentor is important for these trainees in

order for them to reflect upon their practice experience and talk about what they did how well they did it and their potential for doing better. By this reflection they learn to theorise about their practice experience.

The planned and systematic approach in this professional dialogue seems, according to the experience of these trainees, to promote reflection in the process of learning to teach. Several of the respondents in the table above mention this effect. Some underline that the sharing of PSO in the practice group, trainees and mentor makes more focus on the defined learning tasks. By this insightful information more accurate observations can be made and feedback can be more constructive. S02 expresses this in the following way:

> …You become more reflective and by sharing this task with your mentor and classmates, they all know what you want to develop and achieve…

As the quality of relationships plays a vital part in the success of LC, I wanted to elicit how these student teachers experienced the relationship within which they had to work during their practice period.

6.9 Mentor-student teacher relationships

In order to process LC successfully, a relationship based and trust and understanding both in the practice group of three or four trainees and between the trainees and mentors seems to be a precondition. Accordingly, it was of interest for my study to explore how these interactions were perceived by the participants and see whether LC is a tool for improving the quality of these interactions or not. Since the mentors were not interviewed in this study, I only knew one of them; I judged it quite difficult to identify any of these 7 mentors. In addition in the new

assessment system, introduced in 2003, all teacher educators, in the college and in schools, have to be assessed by their students. From this perspective I assumed that exploring the quality of mentor/student teacher interaction was appropriate.

The purpose of my research question here was to focus on the quality of the relationship between mentors and student teachers and between the students themselves. My aim was to explore the influence of the LC process on this relationship.

Interview question: **IQ3**: How do you evaluate the relationship with your mentor and fellow trainees?

ST	Views on trainee-mentor relationship	Views on trainee-trainee relationship
001	It was good. At first the feedback after lessons was too short but it did improve.	It was all right.
002	I felt that my mentor was a good learning coach. I got very good feedback.	My classmates gave me valuable feedback which made me rethink my lessons.
003	I co-operated very well with my mentor. The mentoring was so much better than last year. The mentor gave us constructive feedback, both positive and negative.	We co-operated very well in the group.
004	It was very good.	It was very good.
005	Very good.	Very good.
006	Quite good. The mentor was new but better than the previous one. We had very good communication in professional dialogues after each session.	I knew the students two boys and one girl from working with them in the past. Most of the time the two boys and the two girls worked in pairs and then we worked in a whole group of four. Some lessons were taught in groups of one girl and one boy.
007	The mentor was extremely nice	We co-operated very well.
008	It was good	I had never worked with these students before, but it was good. No tension occurred; everybody worked well. I worked with portfolio methods and learnt a lot.
009	We had a good co-operation with the mentor. She gave very good feedback.	The group didn't co-operate too well. The feedback we gave each other was OK but the co-operation could have been better. The mentor didn't think that the co-operation in our group was good.
010	Very good.	Extremely well. We were four in the group, three with very strong personalities and one who is not that strong. We tried to keep an open communication and frequently asked this fourth person about her opinion.
011	I was disappointed that my mentor didn't want to use LC. I had to force her to look at the format.	My practice was good but I felt that we didn't give enough feedback in relation to the defined learning tasks because we were not enough informed about our purposes and strategies. I would have liked to

		get more feedback all the time.
012	Very good co-operation, no problems.	My classmates gave me good, constructive feedback about areas where I had to improve myself. They were honest and it was good.
013	Very good. He supervised us during lessons and gave us very constructive feedback in professional dialogues. He was very nice, a really good mentor.	We were able to share the teaching and had a very good co-operation. We had a good week plan. Everything went well.
014	It went well.	Very good.
015	I co-operated well with the mentor.	I felt that the three others were too dominant. They talked all the time. Even if they said a lot of reasonable things, it was difficult to make yourself heard when somebody talks all the time.
016	I had a very good co-operation with my mentor.	Very good. We spent a lot of time preparing teaching but we learnt a lot.
017	We worked very constructively with the mentor- good interactions. The mentor gave us very constructive feedback.	Very good. We spent a lot of time preparing teaching but we learnt a lot.
018	Very good.	Very good co-operation.
019	It was very good a very constructive practice period.	
020	The mentor was very good.	I knew the others so we co-operated well.
021	I envisaged more constructive feedback from the mentor particularly about what I could develop and where and how I could improve myself. Not everything is positive.	
022	My mentor knew well how to use LC. She was positive and serious very engaged and motivated. She worked hard to get control of what she wanted to control.	The way our group was composed was extremely good. Our interests coincided but we were also different in a way that broadened the competencies of the whole group. We motivated and encouraged each other. I felt that the whole period of practice was very good.

Table 6-13*:* Mentor-student teachers and student-student relationships

6.9.1 Co-operation with mentor - how good was it?

As seen from the table above, almost all the trainees describe their co-operation with their mentors as quite good, good or very good. About 20 of the 22 participants express this kind of satisfaction. The reason why they find it good and satisfactory is an obvious sign of how

constructive the feedback was from their teaching performances. S013 gives the most positive evaluation of the interaction with the mentor:

> …Very good. He supervised us during lessons and gave us very constructive feedback in professional dialogues. He was very nice, a really good mentor…

The core elements in this mentor-trainee interaction are good supervision, constructive feedback and the personality of the mentor who was ‘very nice’.

The need to be evaluated after lessons seems inherent and both positive and negative feedback is appreciated. S003 compares the mentoring of the previous practice period with the current one and praises the latest mentor for constructive feedback of both kinds:

> …I co-operated very well with my mentor. The mentoring was so much better than last year. The mentor gave us constructive feedback both positive and negative…

Two of the cohort of 22 were not satisfied with the co-operation with their mentors; respondents 011 and 021.The first one was very disappointed that the mentor was not interested in using the LC format and makes this comment:

> …I was disappointed that my mentor didn’t want to use LC. I had to force her to look at the format…

It is understandable that a mentor/learning coach who is not familiar with the SOL/LC approach would be reluctant to engage in the LC process. For a trainee, who has prepared the LC and been able to fill in the format, however, the frustration caused by the mentor’s hesitation is equally understandable.

The other negative experience, expressed by 021, is linked to the quality of the feedback. This answer shows a quite mature attitude, as s/he wants to be told the truth about personal performance and get constructive feedback of how to improve her/him/self:

> …I envisaged more constructive feedback from the mentor particularly about what I could develop, where and how I could improve myself. Not everything is positive… (S021)

It is obvious that this trainee who is focused on own professional and personal development is very much open to constructive feedback, or more explicit coaching and is disappointed when this does not occur. The sentence: 'Not everything is positive', is a reaction or a comment that many trainees have made when they think about the quality of trainee-mentor interactions. The problem is that when a mentor after a lesson tells a trainee that it went well or was good without giving specific examples of what was good or explaining why, the trainee is left in a state of confusion. For student teachers who are developing and in the process of learning and learning to teach, there will be moments where good practice occurred but also moments where they did not.

A good professional dialogue between the trainee and the mentor could analyse this problem and support the reflective process of the trainee in a constructive way. Mentors who are not able to respond to the needs of the student teachers in this respect fail to promote both professional and personal development. The use of language is a key element here. It has to be explicit and precise in order to convey a clear and understandable message. S022 in contrast to S021, quoted above, seems to be among the students whose needs were met by a good mentor, as s/he says:

> …My mentor knew well how to use LC. She was positive and serious, very engaged and motivated. She worked hard to get control of what she wanted to control… (S022)

This mentor seems to have processed LC earlier and could have been the one who took part in the first LC study.

6.9.2 Relationship in the practice group

Among the respondents to this question three of the students (017, 019, and 021) did not want to say anything about the nature of the co-operation in the practice group. Seven of them (001, 004, 005, 007, 014, 018, 020) give a short comment that it was good, very good or all right. Eight (002, 006, 008, 010, 012, 013, 016,022) give a longer comment, all quite positive. Two (009, 015) say that the group did not co-operate very well. 009 claims that this view was shared by their mentor. 015 had problems in making her/him/self heard among three very dominant group members. S011 reports some good practice but is not fully satisfied with the feedback.

From this small sample, it is difficult to say that the LC process promoted good relationships in the practice group. There are, however, reasons to believe that it encouraged openness and a more professional attitude in discussions of teaching performances, as S002 points out:

> … My classmates gave me valuable feedback which made me rethink my lessons…

To get constructive feedback and be honest in this situation seem to be of great value. S012 says:

> …My classmates gave me good, constructive feedback about areas where I had to improve myself. They were honest and it was good…

From this view it could be argued that the structured procedure of LC where purpose, strategy and outcome are predefined and presented openly for discussion creates trust and a caring attitude towards others. If the individual learning tasks are known by everybody and all members of a practice group welcome constructive feedback, both positive and negative, then professional and personal development can be more focused and constructive.

6.10 Conclusion

The implementation of the PCP techniques, the Salmon Line and the Learning Conversation provided me with some valuable knowledge about the views and experiences of these student teachers. Given the limited time for student teachers to experience authentic classroom conditions and the lack of co-operation between the college or teacher educators and schools/mentors, I was left with the impression that these students significantly developed professionally and personally during their field-based practice. I based this impression from the data which I gathered from written documents and research interviews.

LC seems to meet the need for structure and to strengthen mentor-student teacher co-operation. It may also create commitment and motivation for personal development.
The experiences of processing LC, which Table 6.12 displays, helped most of the student teachers to define their learning tasks, strategies and possible outcome, the PSO.

From their commentaries, it is possible to say that this activity promoted reflection and focus on the teaching and learning processes and made many of them conclude that this practice period was better than they had had before.

Up to this stage of my action research project, my investigation had been on student teachers and mentors. Consequently I needed before concluding to bring teacher educators into my study. Knowing that most teacher educators are academics who have never worked as teachers in schools I was curious to know more about their perspectives, beliefs and values which they stressed in their interactions with student teachers in order to promote both professional and personal development. In religious educations most teacher educators in BUC will be theologians whose previous professional lives were led either in the Norwegian Church, as priests or in departments of theology in universities, as lecturers.

According to a recent national evaluation, NOKUT 2006, only 29% of the staff members in the RE department at BUC has school experience, compared to staff members in the department of English who have a 100% school experience. In the next chapter, Chapter 7, I will report on the third action research cycle which I carried out as a small case study focusing on teacher educators' experiences and views.

The purpose of this third action research cycle was to explore how the question of professional and personal development was interpreted among teacher educators in religious education and in pedagogy. At this point of my study I realised that in order to be able to answer my third research question adequately, I had to include this study in my project plan.

CHAPTER 7

THE THIRD ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the perspectives of teacher educators who are responsible for course designs and the creation of teaching and learning activities with their students.
Having explored the views and experience of student teachers as part of my first and second action research cycles, there was a need to investigate teacher educators' experience and views in a third action research cycle.

According to Koster et al., (2004) very little is known about the professional quality of teacher educator since there is no formal education or training for them. The competence of teacher educators, however, is considered important for the quality of teachers. Consequently I found it relevant for my study to explore teacher educators' professional attitudes, values and beliefs. The rationale for this investigation is linked to the perspectives on teacher educators advocated by some of the teacher students who participated in the survey reported in Chapter 5. They expressed some ideal views of how good teacher educators should be (see 5.6.1, 5.6.2 and 5.6.3). I assumed that in this third action research cycle it was of interest for my study to find out if the views of some of my colleagues corresponded to or deviated from the views of the students. Further I was particularly interested in exploring if these colleagues were aware of and able to promote the qualities I feel teachers in RE need to demonstrate in the classroom, described in the previous chapters.

7.2 Aims and methods of this study

By means of a case study, involving some of the RE educators from the two ITE colleges, BUC and NLA, I hoped to learn more about their experience, reflections and actions.
A case study can be used in order to investigate a particular case focusing on a phenomenon or a group in a particular context (Robson, 2002: 168-179). My case study focused on a group of teacher educators whom I interviewed in order to produce the needed data.

In addition to the purposes described above, I also wanted to discover how these teacher educators face and respond to the challenges of promoting both professional and personal development in their interactions with future RE teachers by asking the following question: 'How do you as a teacher educator perceive the question of personal development in ITE?', a question which is also a prime focus of my investigation.
In addition I wanted to explore whether my concern about the limited structure and inadequate framework for the promotion of these important curriculum aims in RE was shared by other colleagues facing the same challenges.

Using face-to-face interviews, I assumed that I could investigate the experiences, reflections and views of these colleagues and explore what they seek to develop and achieve in their teaching and learning activities with their students. I also wanted to investigate what effect the processing of an alternative practice among student teachers could have on the practice of teacher educators including my own, since 2 of these teacher educators had taken actively part in the LC work shops. This is the concern of my third research question, first introduced in Chapter 1.11:

> 3. What changes would I and my colleagues need to make in our practices as teacher educators in order to promote active participation in this alternative practice among groups of student teachers and mentors?

Reflecting on this question, I needed to start with a focus on educational change and how changes in the context of teacher education are perceived in the literature. I assumed that I needed to be empowered by new insight in this field in order to conduct my interviews in a scholarly way and be able to make my points accurately.

7.3 The problem of educational change

According to Hargreaves (1998), 'teaching is a profession in which feelings and emotions play an essential role'. My long experience in this profession echoes this view. I am aware that my intention - to change for the better not only my own practice of the education of RE teachers but also to inspire change in the practices of my colleagues - was motivated by strong emotions. Thus I was happy to find in the literature the importance of emphasising emotions in the picture of educational change.

Korthagen (2001) argues that in the technical-rationality approach to education, the affective dimension is much neglected. He claims:

> …The problem of educational change first of all is a problem of dealing with the natural emotional reactions of human beings to the threat of losing certainty, predictability or stability….
>
> (Korthagen, 2001)

I am convinced that the author is pointing at a serious problem, particularly in Higher Education where the transmission of knowledge using a technical-rationality approach is still a very dominant approach to teaching and learning, (Light & Cox, 2001). In informal conversations with student teachers about their learning experience in my institution, I often get negative remarks about this problem.

Recently a student told me that s/he was very dissatisfied with her RE lecturer who grew confused when student asked questions: ‘He was not able to answer our questions and got confused every time he was interrupted and had to depart form his lecture scheme’, the student said.

This lecturer probably felt the threat to his ‘certainty, predictability or stability’, which Korthagen talks about, but this attitude leaves students with a feeling of dissatisfaction because their needs are not met. When I started my career as a teacher educator, I am sure that my attitude was similar. After some time exploring and experiencing the context in which I was operating and reflecting upon my fear and what I felt was wrong in my practice, I realised that I had to constantly ask myself: ‘Who are at the centre in my professional work? Who are here to be educated?’ The answer is obviously the student teachers. Then I realised that I needed to create frameworks where close relationships with my students could be created and developed. In an educational setting, positive interpersonal relationships are essential for effective learning, according to The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) project, cited in Whitehead (2006).

Thus my solution was to create more integrated RE programmes and new student-oriented pedagogies starting from the needs of my students. I did this by including my students in the planning and construction of the syllabus and asked them to share some of the work which we had to go through each term. By trusting students to take responsibility for small parts of our teaching and learning activities, I found them more interested and more likely to attend both lectures and seminars.

7.4 Procedure and participants in the case study

This case study was conducted in the two ITE institutions, BUC and NLA, where I conducted the survey reported in Chapter 5.

I interviewed two teacher educators in RE in each college. In NLA, which is a small institution, these two teacher educators take the main responsibility for the RE department. In BUC I tried to involve more colleagues, but this was not possible.

Even though the RE programmes in these two colleges differ, the aims of the education are described in the National Curricula of 1998 and 2003 and all teacher educators have to observe the general national laws and regulations. Consequently the curriculum aim of promoting both professional and personal development and growth among future RE teachers has to be emphasised everywhere.

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In addition to the four teacher educators in RE, two teacher educators in pedagogy from BUC were also interviewed. The main reason for this decision was the fact that these teacher educators took part in the SOL workshop and could therefore inform the study in two valuable ways, namely their views about the education of a good teacher (from the perspective of pedagogy) and their constructive feedback about the value of SOL/LC as a tool for personal and professional development. The following table gives an overview of the participants:

Teacher educators in RE, BUC	Teacher educators in RE, NLA	Teacher educators in pedagogy, BUC
2 males	**1 male, 1 female**	**1 male, 1 female**

Table 7-1: Participants in the case study

4 males and 2 females participated in the study. The intention was to have an equal distribution of gender in all three categories. Due to the composition of staff members, however, this was not possible in the RE department of BUC and therefore this is an exception to the intended plan. After I as a researcher had interviewed the participants and the interviews had been recorded, transcribed and coded, I sent the transcripts to all the interviewees for comments and approval.

I will accordingly divide the report into two parts, each focusing in turn on the three cohorts of the enquiry. The first part will report on the interviews with the four teacher educators in RE. The second part comprises the analysis of the interviews with the two teacher educators in pedagogy who had taken part in the first workshop of Self-Organised Learning (SOL) and the use of Learning Conversation (LC).

7.5 Four interviews with teacher educators in RE

7.5.1 Introduction

Interviewees were informed about the procedure of the interview and the main questions before the interviews took place. The questions were sent to them by e-mail with the necessary information about the purpose of my study, ethical considerations, the rights to withdraw, not to participate and the treatment of data. The interview schedule is outlined in Appendix 5.

The interviewees were informed that these questions would be used as initial topics for conversation. It was, however, underlined that we had to be free to elaborate specific themes according to the answers and ideas which might come up. In this way both interviewer and interviewees were prepared for a more flexible agenda for the interview which could, if necessary, take the form of a research discussion more than a structured interview. Accordingly, we were prepared to elaborate any interesting idea which might occur and depart from the predefined schedule.

The interviewing situation in such a context where the researcher as a teacher educator in religious education acts as a researcher interviewing colleagues is not very usual. Both parties share the experience of knowing from within what it takes to undertake the work of a teacher educator in RE and can inform the interview and discussion from an inner perspective based on their personal experiences.

As all parties in these interactions share extended experience of various curricula and reforms in RE within teacher education, as has been the case with Norway, the interviews are for this reason influenced by their personal experience. The equal position of interviewer and interviewees has to be taken into account as a particular precondition for the outcome of the interviews since two insiders will inevitably develop a conversation that will deal with common concerns, experience, challenges and visions based on the knowledge of agents within the area in question. The report will be given according to the interview questions in turn.

7.5.2 Teacher educators' perception of personal development in ITE

Interview question 1- IQ1:

- One of the main aims of RE in ITE is to promote personal development and growth. How do you as a teacher educator perceive this aim?

Partici-pant	Insti-tution	views
TE1	**BUC**	My primary task is to transmit the specific knowledge and insight in RE that might influence the reflection of teacher students who are in a process of professional and personal development. My main concern is to try to engage them, make them ask questions and face the problems related to existential issues.
TE2	**BUC**	Personal development and growth is a central aim of the curriculum, but this is perhaps not your main concern in your daily work. My main concern is to transmit the various issues listed in the reading list of the curriculum, so that students are well prepared for the exam. These issues are, however, related to important existential questions. In the study of the Christian faith and tradition, ethics, pedagogies, life stances and philosophy, students learn to reflect and are nurtured to grow and develop as persons. This has to do with the process of growing from a young person into a responsible adult. In this process, RE can play the role of summarizing the experiences of the students both their life experience and what they experience in the course of their education.
TE3	**NLA**	My view is that that this aim as it is described in the national RE curriculum and in the ITE curriculum, is difficult to come to terms with. The reason is that it is an aim which you cannot check to see whether you have fulfilled it. By means of exams you can verify knowledge acquisitions, but personal development is too general and it is doubtful whether students themselves are able to answer that question. According to my experience, it is easier to evaluate RE after the course and in many cases when the training as a teacher is completed. Retrospectively, you might be able to reflect and say something about your experience. What students tell us is that RE was interesting and that they have learnt a lot, but they don't tell us about their personal development and growth as humans.
TE4	**NLA**	In this institution it is important for us to construct teaching and learning activities that can reflect religious education in schools. As teachers in RE we have to promote ourselves clearly and support students on a personal level wherever they are. The perspective of pluralism has to be presented in a way that everybody feels confident and each learner is met with tolerance and respect. The same pedagogical principles have to guide all RE activities as they are defined in the national curriculum. This curriculum tells us to promote respect and understanding for Christian and Humanistic values.

		Our main concern is to create a framework where teacher students in RE can meet various religions and life stances in the way that they are perceived and understood by followers. Our RE programme, particularly under the study of pedagogies, claims that a main aim is to promote competence and understanding among teacher students.

Table 7-2: Views of teacher educators in RE concerning personal development in ITE

As seen in this report each respondent answers in a way which makes it difficult to detect a common view. **TE1 and TE2** share the idea that studying the content of RE, the specific themes related to existential questions in life will promote personal development.

TE3 finds the aim of personal development, put forward as an important one in the curriculum, difficult to measure and consequently difficult to know anything about.

TE4 sees the questions in the light of the other aims of the RE curriculum.

This variation in answers does not necessarily present different opinions in response to the question, but reveals individual differences when staff members are faced with this question in an interview situation. It can be concluded that these answers are more curriculum focused than personal development focused. Since the interviewees did no answer my question adequately, there was a need to ask some additional questions which the following table displays:

Partici-pants	Insti-tution	Additional questions	Answers
TE1	**BUC**	Do you think that specific issues, like professional ethics can promote this personal development?	This is my main point. I try to create a framework for personal development to take place, but my role is a more passive one.
TE2	**BUC**	Do you consider RE to comprise specific qualities to promote this personal development? Do you think that a process of recognition of personal life experience takes place?	Yes, but you can't isolate specific topics- you have to consider the whole programme-. My main point is that RE deals with the human condition as a whole. As a human being you have to be responsible for your choices, choose between right and wrong and this process initiates personal development. This is what I expect to happen. Biblical stories deal with human conditions; they describe situation where you have to face ultimate limits, to face God, transcendence, ethics. You learn how to face moral dilemmas, many of which are present in the daily life of a classroom or a nursery school.
TE3	**NLA**	Do you think RE needs time to digest and reflect upon what you have acquired from a distance?	Yes, I do believe that, after you have passed the exams, you are more reflective and able to talk about your personal development from RE.
TE4	**NLA**	When you talk about promoting yourself clearly as an RE teacher, what do you mean?	For all students who attend this institution it is clear that this is a Christian Teacher Training College, which implies that all members of staff are Christians. If you are asked about your personal views, you have to be honest, but at the same time be able to respect others who don't share your faith. In schools, teachers will meet pupils from various backgrounds because parents will choose differently for their children according to their personal convictions. All pupils have to be supported by the teacher regardless of religious or non-religious backgrounds. Teaching and learning activities in RE have to be developed from this perspective with the aim of developing the identity of every learner.

Table 7-3: Additional views from the four interviewees

There seems the be a common view expressed in these answers that RE can initiate personal development because of the specific character of the issues dealt with in this subject regardless of pedagogies or particular emphasis on this development.

The importance of the religious platform of the ITE institution seems to play a major role for teacher educators in NLA, which is - as previously mentioned- a private Lutheran ITE institution. This view is exemplified by the arguments put forwards by TE4. Even if this view is not specifically expressed by TE3, a colleague from the same institution, TE4 acts as a spokesperson for this institution. The point s/he makes is obviously that a Christian institution will try to mirror the Christian ethos in the daily life of the institution. In order to fulfil this aim, they have to appoint teachers who practise the Christian faith. The way individuals perceive this task in a professional context will then vary from person to person.

TE2 seems to have a strong commitment to the Christian faith and Biblical stories because the examples given are all taken from a Christian perspective. In reviewing all the four interviews to detect similarities and divergent perspectives, TE1 and TE3 seem to express a more distant attitude, ‘not being too active in the process of promoting personal development’ in the words of TE1 and talking about how difficult it is to measure this development, as TE3 does. From their views, TE2 and TE4 seem to be more personally involved in the process.

From this limited material it is perhaps impossible to draw any conclusion. Maybe the only important finding which might inform the investigation constructively is the importance of ‘the personal’ in the education of an RE teacher and how determinant personal attitudes, values, reflection and the behaviour of teacher educators are in the construction of course designs and activities taking place in teacher educators’ interactions with students.

7.5.3 The gap between theory and practice

Interview question 2, IQ2

- How do you solve the problem between theory and practice, between teaching and learning within the college and the RE teaching and learning activities in schools?

Partici-pant	Insti-tution	Views
TE1	**BUC**	The issues studied in RE have a theoretical character. Consequently I as a TE am challenged to engage and make students take an active part in the teaching and learning process. I do this by using art, excursions, problem-solving learning and Self-Organised Learning. I would also like to develop portfolios and make students write more as a part of their schemes of student-oriented learning
TE2	**BUC**	I try to separate teaching as part of the course design and individual counselling. Students ought to expect that a TE in RE will possess the skills of pastoral care and can be contacted for personal conversations if needed. In my interactions with students I try to be engaged in the subjects and by this engagement try to engage them. I use discussions and dialogues in this approach. For RE in schools, I advise them to use teaching manuals and encourage them to develop individual strategies according to their personal talents and interests.
TE3	**NLA**	The challenge of bridging the gap between theory and practice has to take place within this institution and in schools. As a teacher educator I use various themes related to appropriate pedagogies to prepare students for what they can expect in the teaching and learning of RE. I see myself as a role model. I am aware of the fact that it is difficult to teach religions that are not part of our personal experience. Within ITE, I cannot create an authentic context for the teaching of RE in grade 5, but I can discuss how it can be done with my students. Their challenge is to try it out in their school-based practice. I use myself as one example of practice among many other examples of practice.
TE4	**NLA**	I see this as a tremendous challenge and not a problem. A teacher educator has to make sure that students have a sufficient level of RE knowledge and at the same time convey images of good practice. The issues dealt with in our reflection about RE pedagogies are important because they create these images. Teacher educators in this institution are also supervisors who visit all students in schools. After each practice period we are informed in reports by mentors about the progress of students and what tasks the students have to face if they are to develop as teachers.

Table 7-4: RE teacher educators' views on the gap between theory and practice

The challenge of developing a more holistic approach to teaching and learning in ITE with the purpose of bridging the gap between theory and practice is felt by all these RE teacher educators but the answers given to this challenge vary from person to person.

Within the ITE institution the main task is to help students to pass the exams and qualify to teach RE in schools. In the programme under which the present research was done, new approaches meant to bridge the gap between theory, the study of RE within the college, and school-based practice, the teaching and learning of RE in schools were in their initial phase. Thus teacher educators would have only a limited experience of the implementation of these new approaches. All of them seem, however, to be concerned about how they as teacher educators could devise schemes of coming to terms with the theory-practice gap. As the answers given are diverse, it is difficult to detect common ideas in the views put forward in the interviews.

In comparing the answers given from the two institutions, NLA seems, as a private Christian college, to put more emphasis than BUC, a state college, does on coming to terms with the subject-practice challenge in its RE programme and course design.

The two representatives from BUC are more concerned about what they do within ITE in the college than the two representatives from NLA who emphasise the shared responsibility of the ITE institution and schools for bridging the gap between theory and practice.

The liberty of a private institution to devise and implement coherent programmes and course designs according to its particular philosophy and creed may play an important role in this development. The number of students might also influence the situation since NLA will have about 100 students in RE while BUC has annual cohorts of about 200-225 in this subject.

7.5.4 The framework of Religious Education

Interview question 3, IQ3:

IQ3 What about the framework, the RE programme, course designs and context? Do they support or impede your objectives?

Partici-pant	Insti-tution	Views
TE1	**BUC**	I would like to change the form of exams. The present form represents a kind of control which I am not satisfied with. I have to take on another role than the one I like to have as a teacher educator in RE. I would also like to prepare students to work with specific levels in schools. I would like to implement a system where students have chosen to work in primary, intermediate or lower secondary level in schools. In this way the school-oriented work that we prepare in the college could be more constructive and students could benefit more and be better prepared for practise and the reality of the classroom.
TE2	**BUC**	I feel restrained by the limitations defined by the lecture theatre, classrooms, unsuitable timetabling, like Monday mornings and Friday afternoons. These teaching hours are not the best. I would like to leave this place, visit places of worship and engage in various dialogues with students. You have to work according to a defined curriculum, course design, get through reading lists and prepare for exams. Because the college is paid by the government according to results, you have to prepare for the exams, to encourage students to pass. This fact will influence your work and guide your choices.
TE3	**NLA**	The reduction of RE in ITE from 30 credits to 20 credits has undermined the programme. I constantly feel the lack of time. There is so little time, especially for issues related to RE pedagogies.
TE4	**NLA**	In this institution we try to develop interdisciplinary work by means of confluent pedagogy where students are stimulated to develop a holistic perspective and encourage them to grow as persons by using all their senses, listening, understanding, experiencing, acting and practising. In spite of this, mentors ask for a number of skills that they do not find students have acquired. We have to make more efforts to create more coherence in ITE. Students do complain about the diverse quality of mentoring. We are in the process of developing more collaborative work both within the college and with schools. We have to strengthen the way that we prepare students for practice and the quality of mentoring to create more equal conditions for all student teachers. Teacher educator-mentor interactions have to be developed to achieve that goal.

Table 7-5*:* The framework of the RE programme

None of the four respondents are fully satisfied with their working conditions in RE. All of them express wishes and ideas for change to improve its quality. TE3 finds that the government's reduction of the course weighting from 30 credits to 20 credits in the ITE of 2003 limits the chance to cover the wide range of issues in RE, especially those related to pedagogies.

Respondents in both institutions seem be in a process of change and development. Because of the more structured supervisions implemented in the course design, TE4 from NLA seems to have a closer relationship to teacher students and mentors and is consequently more aware of and better informed about the limitations and challenges that ought to be faced in order to improve the quality of the study and professional training of both teacher students and mentors. In the new multi-faith approach, the triad of teacher educators, student teachers and mentors are supposed to collaborate to construct this subject in the classroom. The next question deals with this challenge.

7.5.5 A multi-faith approach to RE in the classroom.

Interview question 4, IQ4:

- As the multi-faith RE subject is a new construct and students are not familiar with this subject from their own schooling, how do you go about making available to students constructive images, relevant to the construction of RE in the classroom?

Partici-pants	Insti-tution	Views
TE1	**BUC**	I think it is important to stimulate students to develop a specific personal interest in RE. If they are particularly interested in art or in philosophy that could be a key factor in their personal development as an RE teacher and a good start in the classroom.
TE2	**BUC**	I try to encourage students to develop their own potential as an RE teacher and start with issues they are engaged in from a more subjective perspective and then gradually focus on other issues in the curriculum
TE3	**NLA**	My experience is that teachers in schools find RE difficult to come to terms with. You are asked to educate pupils, not instruct them. This aim can restrain your creativity. I want to give student teachers confidence and encourage them to create RE lessons which meet both the aim of knowledge acquisition and the exploration of religions and worldviews. As a teacher educator I try to motivate my students to become more courageous and creative in RE. I talk a lot about how to act as a professional RE teacher and at the same time be able to behave adequately in the classroom, be open and engaged with respect and tolerance and encourage learners to engage in dialogues. It is difficult, but this is the main outcome I want to convey in my interactions with students.
TE4	**NLA**	I benefit a lot from the way in which the teaching and learning of pedagogies are structured in this institution. We arrange special days for pedagogies. The content will have an interdisciplinary perspective where teacher educators from various subjects co-operate to develop teaching materials as resources for practice. In RE each practice group has to choose a theme for their practice period. They have to prepare lessons, teaching and learning activities and take part in evaluation discussions with mentors and teacher educators.

Table 7-6: Teacher educators' views on multi-faith RE pedagogies

According to the national curriculum, all ITE programmes have to devise a course design comprising both teaching and learning activities within the institutions and in schools. Organisation, duration, content and assessment are to a great extent defined by this curriculum. The experiences of these four teacher educators are thus probably quite similar.

There are, however, institutional variations due to local interests, needs and emphasises. Interdisciplinary work and constructive collaboration seem to be more developed in the private Christian college than in the state one. TE1 and TE 2 from BUC see this question more from the perspective of the ITE college than do TE3 and TE4 from NLA. Even if the material is too limited for any conclusion to be drawn, this fact may indicate that the model from which they operate in NLA is more school-oriented than the one used in BUC.

7.5.6 The importance of specific values and attitudes

Interview question 5, IQ5:
- What are the most important values and attitudes underpinning your interactions with students?

Partici-pants	**Insti-tution**	**Views**
TE1	**BUC**	RE comprises a wide range of issues; it has to do with knowledge but also traditions, culture, faith and convictions. There will definitely be issues all learners can take an interest in. As an RE teacher, you have to stimulate particular interests among learners and use this as a key to other areas of the subject. The most important challenge is to be engaged and thereby engage your students.
TE2	**BUC**	A teacher has the choice of being engaged in her/his subject, to develop good pedagogies, or be more indifferent to this question. I try to encourage my students to take the first attitude. This is a challenge, because individual teachers will have specific interests in some subject areas and there will be others that they find less interesting. As a professional you can't let these circumstances influence your interactions with learners. You must try to engage in all topics and motivate reflection among learners.
TE3	**NLA**	This is a very big question. I would like to transmit through my behaviour that students have to demonstrate enthusiasm for RE and have the guts to fight for what they believe in, to organise a service in a church or whatever.
TE4	**NLA**	I try to transmit the specific Christian and Humanistic values that this subject is based on. Theses values are outlined in the National Curriculum. In RE you are supposed to promote understanding and respect for various views and systems of belief put forward by individuals coming from different cultural, religious or non-religious backgrounds. My main concern is to be able to mirror this attitude in my interactions with students, to give them a good example of how they are supposed to interact with their pupils in the classroom.

Table 7-7*:* Teacher educators' values and attitudes

There seem to be two different foci when these respondents are faced with the question of values and behaviour. The Christian and Humanistic values are specifically mentioned by TE4, but as these values are central values defined in the National Curriculum, the other respondents may take them for granted as they are normative in the guidance for all subjects.

When the answers are analysed, the two representatives from BUC, appear to place the focus on the teaching and learning activities in the college and are more general in their arguments while the two other respondents from NLA see this question in a wider context, embracing both general aspects on the one side and schools and classrooms on the other.

7.5.7 Individual nurturing of teacher students in religious education

Interview question 6, IQ6:
-Do you have adequate opportunities to nurture student teachers on an individual level?

Partici-pants	**Insti-tution**	**Views**
TE1	**BUC**	I feel that the new 20 credit RE curriculum limits our possibilities here. We as teacher educators are challenged to guide our students into the world of religions. According to my ideas, this can be done most constructively if you start at a local level with what students already know and are familiar with. Having established this platform you can widen the perspective and maintain interest and enthusiasm among students.
TE2	**BUC**	If I had the freedom to create course designs according to my own ideas, my teaching and learning activities with students would probably be quite different from those I make use of in the actual framework. Then I might be able to focus more on the nurturing challenge.
TE3	**NLA**	I feel restrained by the framework as I have too many students to deal with, about 100. As I teach also pre-school teacher students, in a group of 40, I can see how much easier it is to form closer relationship with these students because there are fewer.
TE4	**NLA**	Because we belong to a small ITE college, we have the chance to get to know students on a more personal level. But we feel that there are some limitations that restrain us from doing what we would like to do when it comes to encouraging, and seeing all students in such a way that each future teacher feels supported and stimulated to develop her/his potential. The most obvious limits have to do with shortage of staff members and resources, the time allocated for each student and lack of adequate structures for school-based practice. We envisage a task here in which all agents in ITE have to take part, to improve and create more coherence in this education.

Table 7-8*:* Views on the nurturing task of teacher educators

A common experience of these teacher educators is the limited course model which had to be created because of the reduction of RE in ITE from 30 credits to 20 credits, consequent on the reform of 2003. As all of them have the experience of teaching programmes, 30 credits and 20 credits, they are all able to compare the two.

The reduction of subject credits entailed fewer hours for teaching and learning and consequently less time to be with the students. It also entailed a reduction in the number of staff. These reductions accordingly entail less chance to nurture personal development among student teachers. The nurturing task seems to be easier in a small college such as NLA than in BUC where the number of students is considerably higher. But even in this small college, a shortage of staff and resources is deeply felt as expressed by TE4. All of these respondents ask for more freedom to be able to do what they want to do. They ask for new structures for implementing new ways of work.

7.5.8 Reflecting upon my interview experience

I found these research interviews or discussions with these colleagues in RE of great interest, not only for my enquiry but from a wider professional point of view.

By taking on the role of a researcher I could in a way distance myself from the interviewee and I felt that all the participants wanted to contribute constructively to my investigation by being honest and open to my questions. In my reflection about this experience, I concluded that I could not have achieved the same results if I had only exercised my own role as a teacher educator.

The benefit of knowing the context, reforms and challenges of RE from long experience afforded me also the same inner perspectives as my interviewees. Consequently I can infer that my concern and my wish to initiate educational and institutional change in ITE were shared with these colleagues.

7.6 PART II: Two interviews with teacher educators in pedagogy

7.6.1 Introduction

The reason for interviewing two teacher educators in pedagogy was first to learn their views on the personal development of student teachers during their educational process to become teachers and second to elicit their views on SOL/LC as a tool for student/teacher interactions. These two interviewees had taken part in the SOL workshop and could therefore from this perspective evaluate this approach. I devised an interview schedule which is presented in Appendix 6.

The interviews were conducted in Bergen University College in the academic year 2003/2004. They were recorded by me, the researcher, then transcribed and sent to the participants for clarification and consent. Ethical considerations were transmitted.

7.6.2 Professional and Personal Development from the perspective of Pedagogy

Interview question 1, IQ1:

-As a teacher educator in pedagogy how do you perceive the possibilities and task to promote both professional development and growth in ITE?

The following table presents the views:

Participants	**Views**
TEI	From the very beginning, I have felt this as my major task. The emphasis on personal development has varied in the following way: **In the 1970s**: emphasis on the autonomous students. The teacher has to be independent **In the 1980s**: more emphasis on effectiveness and results. A more mechanical view within pedagogy

	from 2000 there seems to be more emphasis on the whole person, and this might come more into focus with the reform of 2003 in ITE **Restraints:** Shortage of time is an obstacle to bringing about what you really want to do with students. Emphasis on 'buildung' or nurturing the person takes time. During the two last years our subject has been reduced to half of what we used to have. Because of this problem you have to focus on the teaching of the content of the curriculum and to devise schemes of problem-based learning (PBL)
TEII	I consider the promotion of personal development to be my main task. I would like this task to be more explicitly present in all our work. We have the possibility, if we manage to put this concern forward in discussions and collaboration with our colleagues. **Restraints:** The framework we work in is essential. We depend on the structure decided by the administration and we need to be supported in this task, which I would place at the centre of my work.

Table 7-9: Professional/personal development in ITE from the perspective of 2 teacher educators in pedagogy

As seen in these answers the challenge of promoting personal development along with professional development is a major task for teacher educators in pedagogy. However, the framework in which they have to work is restricted and has limitations for what they really would most like to do with their students.

This experience is shared with the teacher educators in RE, so none of these six teacher educators from two different subject areas feel that they have enough time for the teaching and learning activities they would like to create with student teachers. The question is then what they can do to compensate for these obstacles in order to promote personal development? This is the second theme to be explored.

7.6.3 Pedagogies for personal development

Interview question 2, RQ 2

– What strategies do you implement in order to promote personal development among your students?

Participants	View
TEI	I try to connect subject theory to the experience of the students. In some classes this can be very fruitful, students are encouraged to open some doors they have never seen before and they experience this as very positive. In other classes students are preoccupied with the content of the curriculum; they are not interested in developing their own perspective and see discussions as a waste of time. In field-based authentic situations, students might experience in genuine meetings with pupils what it takes to be a teacher, and they will see that pedagogy is more than passing an exam. This experience might influence attitudes and behaviour and result in a more holistic perspective on what they ought to prioritise in the process of becoming a teacher.
TEII	I try to focus on the students. All interactions can be defined as meetings with students and then you have to listen to them. When I teach or lecture, I try to vary how I do it. I try to avoid absolute answers, not merely transmit knowledge, but stimulate students to ask questions and allocate good time for discussions and reflection. This is a way of promoting the learning process and avoids acting as a controller. I see this as a way of promoting autonomy among students. I find control very negative; it restrains the personal development of students.

Table 7-10: Views on pedagogies for the promotion of personal development

The focus of attention for these two respondents is the students, but the attitudes of the students are important for the way in which interactions between students and teachers evolve. TEI underlines the fact that various groups of students react differently to the same pedagogies. Field-based authentic experiences seem to equip students with the essential experience for personal development necessary to grow as a professional. TEII is concerned with the promotion of autonomy among her/his students. Accordingly s/he departs from the role of being a controller by trying to vary her teaching and learning strategies and stimulate reflection and discussions among students. Since TEI mentioned the need for a holistic perspective on the education of future teachers, I wanted to explore what TEI does in order to promote this holistic education. I did this by means of the following research discussion.

7.6.4 Exploring TEI's views on a holistic approach to ITE

My question:

-Could you please tell me more about how you promote autonomy among your students?

TEI:
In any authentic meeting between a novice teacher and a pupil in the classroom, an experience of recognition occurs. A core is vibrating and the novice teacher recalls her/his own personal experience as a learner. In this particular meeting, pedagogy becomes something more that theoretical knowledge, doing an exercise, writing an essay or passing an exam.

R: Do you see the chance to initiate these processes in ITE?

TEI: Yes, I do because I experience similar processes taking place in some of my classes. Sometimes these processes by means of dialogues can go on for hours. But in other classes, only 4-7 students take part and the others just seem become distracted. When this happens I have the feeling that those who are not able to concentrate, ask themselves about the relevance of what we are discussing to the content of the curriculum. I ask myself, does this have to do with lack of experience? I notice that students become distracted when we deal with issues that they find irrelevant for exam tasks.

R: How can we prepare student teachers to make good choices in teacher-pupils interactions**?**

TE1: From an external perspective, pedagogy is a very discipline oriented subject, defined by psychology, educational philosophy, educational sociology, the understanding of cultures, pedagogies etc. But from an inner perspective all these subjects will help teachers to understand the needs of the learner. Being a learner has to do with a number of circumstances, to be a member of a community, a society, to be able to make various choices. From this inner perspective, we want students to develop a deeper understanding for the learner's situation, the learners themselves, children and young people, but also the situation of their families. From this inner perspective, the various disciplines in pedagogy will develop the perspectives of the students, stimulate their imagination and exploration and make them reflect upon what being a student teacher and being part of a class implies.

R: When you talk about imagination, what do you mean?

TEI: I think about intuition; it has to be developed in interactions with other people, for a teacher more specifically in interactions with children and youngsters. It is very easy to distance yourself from many of the pupils we meet and distance ourselves from their homes. There seems to be a moral reflex tendency to keep a distance from what you find different, particularly values you are not familiar with or do not appreciate. Instead, we ought to develop an understanding of the situation of both pupils and families, which in our society is very urgent.

R: How do you go on to promote this understanding?

TEI: My main approach is dialogue and conversations. According to my experience this strategy is quite efficient. But, on the other hand, my wish is to create pedagogical laboratories where several approaches, such as role-plays can mirror these purposes. There are some important approaches, like guiding students to become good supervisors and good communicators that we have to put aside because of lack of time.

R: According to L97, the National Curriculum, a teacher decides by her/his behaviour if pupils succeed or fail. What kind of behaviour would you as a teacher educator in pedagogy find appropriate*?*

TEI: First I object to this narrow perspective, because it puts the whole responsibility on the teacher. On the other hand, there is some truth in this idea. Teacher behaviour has to establish trust in the learning situation for the learner. The learner has to be seen and respected. The basic needs of the learner have to be met whether the learner is 5-6 or 30-40 years of age.

R: Can you explain what you mean by trust?

TEI: A teacher has to believe in him/herself and believe in the pupil and trust her/his ability to learn. By this experience the pupil's self-confidence will grow. Many pupils lack this feeling of self-confidence. The teacher has to strengthen this self-confidence from the early years. If not, lack of self-confidence will increase and cause difficulties for the learner.

R: How can ITE strengthen the self-confidence of future teachers?

TE1: From the first meeting with a new class of student teachers, you have to be aware of how positive forces can be activated and avoid acting in a way that might restrain this process. You must encourage students to be themselves and not transmit stereotypes of how to be a good student teacher. Reproduction of knowledge is not the main task, but engaging in various experiences of being a teacher and exploring ways of developing your own potential. With this open attitude, student teachers will grow to understand that pedagogy has to do with these experiences, with aesthetic experience.

R: Does this mean that being a teacher has more to do with art than science?

TEI: Yes, I don't believe being a teacher is a science, but it is not actually an art either, it has to do with lived experience.

TEI was the respondent who expressed most clearly how good teacher-learner interactions ought to be created.

7.6.5 The views of TEII

TEII was the first interviewee who mentioned the concept of autonomy and claimed that teacher educators have to develop a variety of teaching and learning activities in order to promote personal development among future teachers (see table 7.10).

S/he claims that teacher educators have to depart from the role of 'controller' and take on other roles in order to stimulate active participation among their students. TEII sees her interactions with students as meetings, (see 3.20) but was, however, very realistic about what you can achieve in ITE by saying:

> …I realise that there are too many challenges to face in ITE. Then it is important for me to tell student teachers that this education is just a start. When they leave this institution they'll engage in a lifelong process of adjustments and improvements

> as a person and a teacher. Teacher educators can initiate this process; teachers themselves have to keep it going…

7.6.6 Conclusion

From these responses it appears that personal development seem to be a central preoccupation among teacher educators in pedagogy. The framework in which they act, however, seem to be inadequate for their best intentions to be carried out as they really want. Their way of coming to terms with this dilemma is to consider what they can do in ITE treated as an initial stage, the inauguration of a lifelong developmental process. The challenge will then be to create good strategies for this initial phase of the process. Self-Organised Learning (SOL) by means of the Learning Conversation (LC) could prove to be able to equip qualifying and new professionals with the skills needed for an essential impact of this life-long teaching and learning process. On the website, created by GTC, General Teaching Council for England, LC is defined in the following way:

> …A learning conversation is a planned and systematic approach to professional dialogue that supports teachers to reflect upon their practice. As a result the teacher gains new knowledge and uses it to improve his or her teaching…"
> (www.gtce.org/LearningConversations, 2004).

The last part of this section II of the case study will focus on LC and the way in which these two participants, teacher educators in pedagogy perceived the effectiveness of this tool for the trainees' personal development in ITE.

7.7 The impact of LC on student teachers' personal development

The views of the two teacher educators in pedagogy who took part in the LC workshop are reported in this section.

Interview question: -You took part in the experience of LC. What do think about this experience?

The following table reports on the answers from the two teacher educators in pedagogy.

Participant	**Views**
TE1	I see LC in connection with the creation of a learning laboratory. In these activities you are encouraged to do some experiments and make some discoveries on the one side and on the other side I think we need to consider implementing a method within pedagogy where students have to advance step by step in a developmental process. These steps are logical levels in a cognitive process, a problem-solving process within a holistic approach. We have to focus on the whole process and not on parts of it. But sometimes it might be fruitful to highlight one particular step which in a given situation is important and relevant. But the process has to be developed in a natural way and at a pace appropriate for the learner.
TEII	I think LC is a good way to develop the skills of supervision, which are very important. Personally, I am very concerned about these skills and have taken courses to develop my own skills in this area. Communication skills are important and to learn more about these skills is important. They are vital for the future. I find the structured conversation in LC based on PSO, purpose, strategy and outcome, a useful and appropriate structure for developing conversational skills.

Table 7-11: Views on LC, expressed by two participants

These two respondents both see the value of LC as a tool for initiating the educational process within ITE. The responses differ because of the different contexts each puts LC into. TEI puts it into a wider holistic context while TEII keeps the perspective of the benefits of LC in mentor-student interactions. According to TEI the process of LC could help student teachers to promote their personal developmental process in a coherent way, a step by step procedure. Since TEII was the one who was most concerned about how LC could be used in the context of supervision, a prime focus of my study, I found it relevant to explore TEII's argument in the following research discussion:

My question: How can LC develop the skills of supervision?

TEII: In the LC procedure, mentors are challenged to support the student teacher. This is a difficult task. The main challenge is to support the reflection and development of the individual students and you have to be specific. My view is that you have to consider the student, initially, to be healthy and robust individuals. They are not in a therapeutic situation; they are open to guidance and coaching. The essential purpose of LC is to develop yourself personally.

R: Do you see LC as a tool to equip students with new images of being a teacher?

TEII: Yes, definitely. I see LC as a way of developing the dominant, too reflective model of Handal and Lauvås (1982) (see Appendix 7). In that model, the teacher is too passive as a role model. In LC the teacher becomes a catalyst able to reflect upon her/his own experience by concrete examples. It seems to make the reflection much longer.

R: In LC learners are challenged to reflect upon their strength and weaknesses. Does it seem easier to define weaknesses than strengths?

TEII: Yes, we must become better at encouraging students to develop their strong sides. That implies personal development. The following message: 'You yourself are the most important instrument in your teaching', has to be strengthened.

7.8 Conclusion

The experience of the learning conversation seems to cover a need felt by these two teacher educators in pedagogy. In order to promote personal development among future teachers, the structured method of LC could supply them with an appropriate method, which, according to TEI, they have not yet developed.

The particular context in which LC was implemented in ITE, as a tool to develop skills of being a teacher, calls for transparent language and examples of good practice. According to TEI, concretisation is necessary in mentor-student teacher interactions to get across the message about

teachers themselves as the main instruments for good teaching. The purpose of LC is professional and personal development and growth. The best way of advancing this process successfully is to consider those who are the centre of this developmental process, the student teachers, as healthy and robust individuals who ask for constructive feedback and coaching. In an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding, they may be able to analyse their strength and weaknesses and with the support of a good learning coach, a mentor or a teacher educator, take action to help and support their personal development and the growth of their individual talents and gifts so as to make use of them as professional teachers.

All the teacher educators whom I interviewed in this case study talked about the limits of the framework in which they have to operate and the compromises they have to make and live with. In this situation, I was particularly sympathetic to the views of TEII about the potential of LC in promoting reflection. By bringing in the word ‘catalyst’ and describe the teacher, student teacher or the learner operating in the learning conversation process as a catalyst (defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as ‘a person or thing that causes change’) I realised how important this change instrument could be for the personal development of future teachers.
The concept of a catalyst is taken from chemistry, where it is a substance which makes chemicals react faster to each other; I saw how appropriate this tool was within a limited specific situation. It brought about much longer and deeper reflection by initiating a continuous process of change which would probably not have been initiated and fuelled without such a catalyst. According to TEII ‘teacher educators can initiate this process among future teachers while they in their own personal and professional lives have to keep it going’.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I reflect upon this study in its entirety and discuss what I have learnt from conducting action research on teacher education in my country. I consider how far I have been able to answer my three initial research questions, first introduced in Chapter One, (see 1.11). My concern was not only to investigate and learn more about the context in which I was operating but also to discover how change can take place in this particular educational setting. Given the limitations of this framework and its lack of time and opportunities, I implemented an alternative practice by means of LC, which afforded a tool for promoting the needed change. In this final chapter I discuss the appropriateness and success - or lack of it - of this new pedagogical tool.

Further, I discuss in the light of my findings the structural changes which need to be set in motion in order to improve the education of future teachers in general and future teachers of RE in particular. In a final research discussion with my critical friend Anna, I elicit her experience of LC as a tool and catalyst in her mentoring work and consider how I as a teacher educator can develop schemes of working procedures in which further uses of LC can be developed.

I also reflect upon the knowledge, insight and understanding which I gained from this study and how my AR project entailed a process of change on both a personal and a professional level. Finally I consider the limits of the study and possible future direction of research in this field.

8.2 Change in Teacher Education

According to Korthagen (2001) change in teacher education takes time. He calls for an ongoing development as a joint effort on the part of teacher educators who work closely together, regularly discussing their ideas and staying in contact with teachers in schools. He also finds that the research reports, which could offer a basis for change and development, have little influence (Korthagen, 2001: 271). Korthagen is convinced that research in teacher education requires a type of research which is closely connected to practice and is carried out from an insider's perspective.

From my own insider perspective, I have been able to see that the innovative work which I carried out by means of LC, has enabled me to identify and better understand some of the problems in the education of an RE teacher. Lack of appropriate professional training of mentors and the poor co-operation between teacher educators and mentors were among these problems. It can be argued that this was something which I already knew, but I am convinced that my research activities created a situation of professional certainty which was new to me.

Before carrying out my research, I based my knowledge on my experience of and my beliefs about my practice. My investigation then afforded new knowledge based on my research findings. Consequently I gained a new position where I could claim to contribute to new knowledge based on evidence. As a result I feel that my professional situation has improved because I have been able to participate in discussions with new moral and intellectual authority.

8.2.1 My personal learning process

The implementation of an alternative approach to practice in my first action research cycle revealed that what I knew about student teachers' experiences of and views on the RE programme was rather limited. This insight entailed further investigation by means of the survey, reported in Chapter Five. In this process I realized that my emphasis on student-oriented learning, which I considered to be among my most important educational values, was not sufficiently communicated in my practice. Reflecting upon the reason for this, I came to realize that my students do indeed see me (among others, of course) as an important role model for them as future teachers. If this is the case, I have to promote myself as a fit role model by demonstrating examples of good practice.

This perspective implies that I have to compose lectures where I transmit RE knowledge in creative and stimulating ways and at the same time stimulate the process of learning to transmit this knowledge in school classrooms with learners of various ages. By acknowledging my position as a role model for future teachers, I came to see that my work, my assumptions and my actions must embrace teaching and learning in a more transparent way than before. According to Loughran (2006), an appropriate pedagogy for teacher education can not inform practice if 'there were a distance between the teaching and the learning, the researcher and the researched, the self and the experience' (Loughran: 2006: 175). I started my action research project by a concern about the quality of my practice, my main question being: 'How can I improve my practice?' My action research journey has produced relevant answers to this question. It has created a deeper personal understanding about teaching and learning about teaching, which I can only describe as a revelation. Throughout this creative journey I have developed constructive inner discussions with myself as a person and a practitioner. The onion model presented in 2.20, which seeks to

embrace cognitive, emotional and spiritual literacy, was very important for my personal change process. This model has left a lasting impact on me and it has inspired me to constantly question my mission and inner calling for my work. I am convinced that such an inspiration, embodied in my actions, can diminish the contradictions between my values and actions, between what I say and what I do, in such a way that my deeply-held values as an RE teacher educator, my commitment and engagement can appear. I believe that only by demonstrating this kind of attitude and behaviour, in an on-going-personal developmental process, can I presume to offer myself as a good role model for future RE teachers.

8.2.2 Learning in authentic frameworks

My close collaboration with my critical friend Anna during the long years of research updated my knowledge about the problems and challenges for teachers and pupils in schools. This knowledge was not only transmitted in face- to- face discussions, but was developed in several visits to her school.

Since alternative practices by means of the LC process were implemented in authentic contexts in schools, I gained new insight into the process of learning to teach and the problems and obstacles which my students have to face when they must make their own way as professional teachers. In order to understand the importance of these authentic experiences for a student teacher’s professional and personal development, I realized that I had to get a deeper understanding of the interpersonal and intrapersonal communication and transference which takes place in teaching and learning situations.

Empowered by the insight which I had gained through the implementation of LC, I came to the conclusion that this was an efficient and appropriate educational tool in the context in which it

was implemented. This led me to want to understand better why this procedure seems to be efficient in trainee-mentor interactions and why those who took part in the LC procedure were motivated to grow and develop personally.

8.3 Understanding transference in relational communication

Binder (2006) claims that in the theory of human motivation, humans are understood to be contact seeking and meaning making, both through the history of their development, but also in their on-going relationships here and now.

Given the limited time allowed for a student teacher to experience authentic work in a classroom, the relationship which is created in this context particularly that with the mentor, understood as the expert in this professional work, must express a high degree of personal meaning in order to motivate change and transformation.

How is meaning fostered? Binder argues that meaning is fostered when a community of at least two persons communicates. For novices such as student teachers this communication becomes meaningful when an interlocutor such as a mentor responds adequately to them. At the same time an inner communication takes place which is both closed and open. Lived experience and past communication with other interlocutors will influence the way in which we perceive the present moment for we tend to put new experiences into old forms (Binder, 2006). In making this effort, we find new perceptions of reality emerging. The question is then ‘What conditions are present in the relation which creates the possibility of one person’s learning something from another?’ I found that it clarified my reflection to use the Levinasian approach to the teacher-student relationship, as presented by Joldersma (2001). He calls this approach ‘Pedagogy of the Other’.

8.4 Pedagogy of the Other

Joldersma introduces the concept of 'Pedagogy of the Other', derived from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1996). In a successful learning process the learner acquires a new skill, knowledge, or habit. By the end of this process, something new has been thematized and integrated into the learner's existing totality and economy of knowledge, into his or her consciousness (Joldersma, 2001: 183). However, the possibility of gaining something new comes from the learner's 'welcoming the stranger' (that is the mentor in student teacher-mentor interaction) into his or her world. Joldersma claims that teaching is 'a kind of showing by the other, perhaps a verbal saying' (Joldersma, 2001: 183). In this process the teacher by means of speech thematizes an ambiguity of a hitherto silent part of the world. For learning to succeed, the learner's task must be to welcome the teacher, the person who thematizes.

Drawing upon Levinas' book: 'Totality and Infinity' (1969), Jodersma claims that

> …Attention is attention to something because it is attention to someone…
>
> (Joldersma, 2001: 183)

In this argument an emphasis on the quality of human relationships becomes essential. In a student teacher-mentor relationship and in all other teacher-learner relationships there is asymmetry and no symmetry because of the particular situation in which they meet. The teacher is there to educate another person while the student is there to learn. Comparing the position of these actors, the student is the more vulnerable and weaker of the two because s/he is totally exposed to the other, the teacher. According to Jodersma, this vulnerability of the student obliges the teacher to act for the good of this person, whose otherness and uniqueness call upon the teacher to assuming responsibility for her/him as a person.

The argument is that in a pedagogical relationship the teacher is responsible to the learner for herself/himself because s/he is irreplaceable. No human interactions can take place if the student is not present. The influence of Levinas is particularly visible in Jodersma's claim:

> ... In the pedagogical relationship I am responsible to the student whose face I see. S/he is irreplaceably calling me to respond. I as a teacher am to be obedient to the obligations imposed on me by the face of the student. The uniqueness of the student is an appeal to the teacher's responsibility towards him or her…
>
> (Joldersma, 2001: 187)

Because of the asymmetry in the teacher-student relation, the task of the teacher is to offer something to another person, the student, and then to be assured of its acceptance. The teacher offers something which may not be accepted or may be accepted in a different way from the one in which it was offered. According to Joldesma, from the perspective of the student, learning is a request before one knows what to ask for, a kind of prayer. He argues:

> …It is the student's exposure to change before knowing what the change will actually be, a change unforeseen…
>
> (Joldersma, 2001: 187)

From this point of view both teaching and learning inherently are insecure and unstable. Whitehead (2006) argues that when educators aim to influence, they do so in the clear understanding that what they are trying to communicate will inevitably be filtered through the creative imagination of another, (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 58).

There are, however, to Whitehead's mind, cases where people are not able to choose; as he puts it:

> … Frequently people are persuaded to accept uncritically the message of the culture and so do not even see the need to question... (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 58)

To this argument I would reply that people are also persuaded to accept uncritically the message of religions and are not allowed to raise critical questions.

This takes place primarily in homes and in religious communities where the aim is to persuade individuals to become adherents of one particular religious faith, but it might also occur in schools. The aim of the RE programme in Norway is, however, not to persuade but to educate learners. In this context educators will have to find ways of stimulating a critical awareness and welcoming critical questions. I fully agree with Whitehead's arguments in what follows:

> …It is the job of educators to encourage people to see that they do need to question, in order to realize the full potential of their humanity, as creative, free-thinking people, so they can live together with others who, while sometimes radically different in outlook and appearance, are the same in their own inherent precious uniqueness…
> (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006: 58)

In this discussion, two essential questions emerge. First; 'How can the insecure and unstable situation in pedagogical encounters be remedied?' and second, 'How can critical questioning be stimulated in these encounters?'

In the light of my investigation and the findings which I have presented in the previous chapters of this thesis, my answer would certainly be: ’By means of effective pedagogical tools such as techniques derived from personal construct psychology and positive psychology’.
According to the experience of implementing these tools, there are reasons to believe that their attribute of autonomy offers a process of acquiring more security and stability, both for the learner and for the coach. By focusing on the learner’s/student teacher’s personal needs and wishes, a critical awareness is stimulated, particularly in the process of reflecting upon and putting into words judgements of personal strengths and weaknesses.

In my qualitative study, I found that student teachers experienced deep satisfaction when they were able to talk about their strengths and weaknesses. They told me that they felt particularly happy when they were able to find and describe their strengths. This feeling is probably linked to the personal motivation to learn and the concept of self-efficacy, introduced in Chapter 7. Zimmerman (2000) classifies self-efficacy as a ‘highly effective predictor of the student’s motivation and learning’. Referring to the work of Bandura (1997) Zimmerman claims that self-efficacious students participate more readily, work harder, persist longer and have fewer adverse emotional reactions when they encounter difficulties than do those who doubt their own capabilities.

8.5 Autonomous and Self-Organised Learning

In my study I found that an alternative approach to practice implemented by means of LC gave both student teachers and mentors an improved practice situation. The participants in this experiment, particularly the student teachers, expressed a high degree of satisfaction. Some of them said that it was ‘my best and most meaningful practice period ever’ and many, both student teachers and mentors, wanted to continue to explore this pedagogical tool in subsequent practice

periods. I would argue that the success of processing LC, even in this limited study, lies in the autonomous attribute of the learning process.

Based on a common focus, in a pedagogical discussion with the aim of determining individual learning tasks, learning strategies and possible outcomes, learner and learning coach enter directly into the centre of what they are supposed to do, even when the field-based practice period is short.

The first question to be asked by the coach was; ‘What do you want to learn, do, develop, acquire here in this school, in this classroom, with these pupils at this specific time?’

This question challenges the student teacher to focus on their personal skills, potential and needs and to reflect upon ways of promoting both professional and personal development. Faced by these challenges, many student teachers clearly see that they have to reconsider their previous experience of school practice and try to connect their new experiences to what they have already achieved. Thus coherence in professional and personal development is created and can continue at a pace which is appropriate for each individual.

This fact came to the surface, the following year, in a negative sense, when I met a student teacher who had taken part in the LC experiment just before completing a new practice period. In this period, her mentor had been quite inexperienced and had had no knowledge about SOL or the process of LC. The student teacher told me that she was very disappointed with this practice period because she had expected to be offered the possibility of resuming her professional and personal development as a teacher at the level which she had reached in the previous period. But since this new mentor had no knowledge of this experience, there could be no continuity in the student teacher’s process of learning to teach. Accordingly, she found this lack of coherence in her education rather frustrating.

The aspect of Self-Organised Learning is also an important element of the success of LC. Being able to suggest and define one's own learning task and discuss it with one's mentor promotes a sense of being in control of the situation. By offering student teachers the possibility of organising themselves, the mentor supports the autonomy of the learners and their capacity for choice.

The active listening skills and the verbal support offered by the learning coach in this situation are very important. By respecting the otherness of the learners and accepting their freedom to choose individual tasks and actions, the coach allows genuine and continuous learning to occur. From a Levinasian perspective, this position demonstrated by the teacher adds to the acceptance of and respect for the personality and the human value of the learners (Henriksen, 2004: 527-539). Human interactions based on these values can be classified as co-creations of new interpretations of the world and consequently new ways of acting in the world (Brudal, 2006: 13). This new way of being and acting in the world is informed by previous experience and consequently represent a new step in a continuous process of professional and personal development.

8.5.1 Student teachers and mentors as co-creators

In order to enter into a situation where new interpretations can be co-created and professional and personal development can take new directions, the mentor must demonstrate a high degree of empathy. Kohut (1984) defines empathy as 'to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person'. In the education of future teachers, teacher educators and mentors have to create frameworks where these inner lives can be revealed and the necessary courage can be mobilized to talk about them. Brudal (2006) claims that demonstrating empathy with the purpose of entering into this inner life of another person involves leaving for a while

one’s own A-format perspective and accepting in its totality, the other’s perspectives, norms, experience and interpretation of lived life and hope for future life (Brudal, 2006: 29-34).

For a student teacher who is in the process of learning and learning to teach, genuine experience in classroom interactions will reveal personal strengths and weaknesses.
In the present study the process of LC offered the possibility of experiencing these specific outcomes - positive or negative - of personal performances. The detailed preparations of these performances in an open dialogue or professional conversation between a student-teacher and a mentor promoted a common understanding of purpose, strategies and possible outcomes of these authentic professional performances. It also revealed inadequate language skills and inspired a search for more accurate words to describe their experiences.

A mentor who believes in the capabilities of a student teacher may influence this person’s beliefs in himself/herself, in her/his self-efficacy. The research of Zimmerman (2000) finds evidence that the more capable students judge themselves to be, the more challenging the goals that they seek. Thus a belief of one’s self-efficacy provides students with a sense of agency to motivate their learning through use of such self-regulatory processes as goal setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation and strategy use (Zimmerman, 2000: 87).

One could accordingly claim that, in the process of learning to teach, self-beliefs about personal capabilities play an essential role in student teachers’ motivation to achieve.
The application of a catalyst such as LC in this process has been found efficient in helping student teachers and mentors to make useful progress.

Thus in a process of planning, acting and evaluating, student teachers and mentors share the experience of the whole process and can accordingly be able to be more accurate and specific in their evaluation of this experience and more capable of personal development. There are reasons to believe that the process of LC in the context in which it was initially implemented -that is, in student teacher-mentor interactions - provides an improved framework for professional and personal development for the participants. In order to test the validity of this argument and investigate any lasting effect of the LC implementation, I asked Anna, my critical friend for a final research conversation.

8.6 Anna's views on the impact of LC on practice

8.6.1 Anna's experience and views

Anna started to implement the LC process with her students about 5 years ago. Thus we have been able to study her experiences over an extended period. So far, she has processed LC with about 5 groups of 3-4 student teachers.

In an informal research conversation which took place in my office during my writing up period of my thesis, she shared this experience with me. I was particularly interested in getting a deeper understanding of how she uses LC and what she sees as the specific outcomes of implementing this tool with student teachers.

She told me that she introduces the student teachers to the LC process and gives them the format by the end of the first practice period. She deliberately does not use LC during this first practice period, because it is too short and student teachers are new to what they have to do as trainees in

a school. By withholding LC until the end of this period, she gives them plenty of time to reflect upon the tasks connected to this procedure, (see 4.13).

The students are told that they have to consider the various PSO steps of the procedure and prepare themselves for an individual LC with her in the beginning of the second practice period. The initial question is always concerned with personal and professional development and the areas of mentoring and feedback most relevant for each individual.

In Anna's experience, student teachers do prepare themselves very well for their individual LCs and they take an active part in them. She finds that these conversations are very much student-oriented and their content is decided by the student teachers. Further, Anna claims that the task given to decide upon and devise one's own learning task, one's PSO and then fill in the formula, is very important. What students write down commits them to taking actions which are prepared and decided upon. To Anna, this procedure represents a clear improvement on the previous approach, based on oral agreements. Anna finds that this written commitment makes student teachers more responsible; they do their best to carry out what they have decided on, using the LC format regularly as a checklist, in addition to the log, in which they have to describe own performances and experiences and reflect upon them. Student teachers give a constructive and positive evaluation of the LC procedure, as they claim that the process makes them better seen and heard by the mentor.

8.6.2 The benefit of processing LC for Anna as a mentor

The benefit of processing LC for a mentor such as Anna is that her work and interactions with students become more structured and better prepared.

Each conversation is a useful step forward in the student teacher's personal and professional development. Thus a coherent development takes place where transparency and openness are

created. Accordingly, all the participants in the process, student teachers and mentors are well informed and can play a constructive role in the activities entailed. Anna claims that LC promotes good human interactions and relationships, since she experiences close and trustful interactions in which she is challenged to act for the good of her students. The time allocated to reflection about classroom performances and individual strengths and weaknesses seems to be longer. By means of LC, Anna claims to have become more reflective and critical and more concerned about the words and language which she employs to student teachers.
Language in this context includes body language, attitudes and behaviour.

Because of the short time for teaching practice, 2 weeks in autumn and 4 weeks in spring, Anna finds the PSO procedure very useful. It is, however, important to take sufficient time to devise realistic learning outcomes and be concrete and specific in the choice of strategies. Because she wants student teachers to experience the achieving of what they have set out to do, she spends a good deal of time with each student teacher in discussing and deciding these issues. Her reason for this meticulous work is that the time for this field-based experience is very short and she wants each practice period to be a good experience and a confirmation of someone's personal capability to be and act as a teacher. She believes that those empowered by this confirming practice experience a continuous personal and professional development as a teacher.

8.6.3 How can LC promote professional and personal development?

Personal practice experiences are important as references in on-going discussions about pedagogies in teaching and learning activities in ITE and have the purpose of bridging the gap between the content or the subjects taught in the college and the potential to create good pedagogies and relevant approaches for learning in classrooms (NOKUT, 2006). Anna is concerned about her efficacy as a role model for future teacher. She finds that the LC process,

which focuses on the personal and professional development of the individual student, challenges each person to find his/her personal voice as a teacher. Finally she is convinced that the experience of autonomy and Self-Organised Learning and the good human relationship created in the LC processes will help and inspire future teachers to create and promote similar interactions in their professional careers as teachers. Accordingly, both pupils and parents will benefit from these skills.

8.7 The LC process from my perspective

In this study I was not able to develop my interventions according to my initial plans. The change in practice procedure, reported in Chapter 6, made new directions necessary. Accordingly, I had to be creative and flexible enough to find appropriate solutions and new ways forward. In this process I particularly valued the stimulating conversations which I had with my critical friend, Anna. The focus of our interest was LC and how it could be best used in order to give future teachers ‘growth-producing’ experiences during their short school-based practice period. The term ‘growth-producing experiences’ was introduced by Feiman-Nemser (2001) in an article called: ‘Helping Novices Learn to Teach’. In this article there is an emphasis on ‘educative mentoring’ and examples of the way in which mentoring has shown the potential to foster powerful teaching.

For me as a teacher educator, the opportunity of working closely with a mentor afforded me new insight into the problem of teacher induction. It is obvious that the skills of knowing what to do in a specific teaching situation can only be learnt in authentic classroom situations. The LC procedure allowed mentors and student teachers to actively participate in this process.

Feiman-Nemser underlines the importance of ‘providing on-site support and guidance’ particularly during the early years of teaching. These induction years are critical because student teachers have two jobs to do; they have to teach and they have to learn to teach.
There are reasons to believe that the lack of constructive support and guidance from teacher educators and mentors during these first years leaves novice student teachers with a feeling of being a failure and consequently they see no future for themselves in the teaching profession (NOKUT, 2006).

In my fieldwork I detected a variety of mentoring skills and professional support to which student teachers were exposed. The use of LC improved this situation, even when participants had only a basic knowledge of and no previous experience in processing this tool. Encouraged by these findings, I started to reflect upon and envisage an ideal structure in which student teachers, mentors and teacher educators could all take part in a continuous educative process.

8.8 An ideal structure for an LC process

I argue that student teachers ought to be introduced to LC by the end of their first practice period of the first ITE year. As a teacher educator, I would arrange workshops for my student teachers and their mentors in order to promote LC skills and experience.
I would also involve teacher educators from other subject areas taught in this first year, such as Norwegian and Mathematics, to create coherence with the component of RE in the ITE programme (see 1.2.1).

As RE is particularly focused in the 2nd practice period of this initial year (according to the reform of ITE in 2003), I would encourage my students to reflect upon an appropriate learning task connected to this subject. The learning task could also be a general one, exemplified by RE.

Instead of the present procedure - team meetings with all mentors and teacher educators - I would involve the student teachers and their mentors in school-based preparatory meetings. In this way we could all focus on the context of their authentic practice.
In these planning sessions, the curricula for the school year and the organization of school work and activities should be presented and discussed. In this way all the necessary information is shared and the timing of the content of the curriculum made known. Consequently student teachers and teacher educators get an overview of the school activities and could better prepare themselves for their own participation in this work.

Before this practice period, student teachers and teacher educators could process LC with the aim of sharing student teachers' PSO and creating good interactions between them.
In this process teacher educators could benefit from implementing the procedure of empathic communication and thereby promote themselves as examples of good practice.
This process could then continue in schools, where it would be guided by mentors, who have also achieved these skills.

8.8.1 Preparing the pupils for the presence of student teachers

Mentors have to prepare their pupils for the presence of the student teachers.
In telling them about the difficult task these student teachers have as teachers and at the same time as people learning to become teachers, mentors can motivate pupils and do their best to bring about a successful result.

Mentors ought also to create a positive expectation in the class by presenting various activities which will take place during the visit of these student teachers. In this practice period the

number of adults in the classroom will increase by 4-5, which implies more support and help for the pupils. The mentors have to present this in positive and encouraging ways.

8.9 The alternative practice - a way forward

It is not easy to envisage a way forward which could change not only one person's practice (namely, mine) but also persuade other teacher educators to change their practices.
I consider my study to afford an example of good practice. My claim relies on the constructive feedback given by mentors and student teachers in which they state that LC improved their practice experience. The procedure is not very complicated and can easily be learnt by some introductory seminars and training. There is a tremendous benefit to be gained from involving all stakeholders in ITE in a common process with the purpose of improving practice and bridging the gap between practice and theory. Thus coherence and co-operation are created.

In this process the sharing of experience and new knowledge about human abilities and institutional development could ultimately transform ITE and schools into dynamic communities of learning. Action research could provide this ongoing professional development. After having planned, carried out and evaluated one cycle of AR, those involved could create new improved cycles based on the evaluation of the previous ones. Thus, student teachers, mentors and teacher educators could all be included in the resulting dynamic communities of teaching and learning.

8.10 Institutional change - where to start?

Reflecting upon my suggestions about institutional change in the context of ITE outlined above, I must admit that the situation is more complex than these arguments convey and that to implement change will take time for training staff, mentors and student teachers. There are, however, reasons to believe that because of the new emphasis on change and coherence in the

professional and personal development of future teachers promoted by the NOKUT evaluation of 2006, initiatives taken in this direction would be welcomed. My question is then:
What can I do to promote an alternative practice by means of SOL?

My answer is as follows: I would continue the co-operation with my RE colleague whose students took part in the second LC intervention (reported in Chapter 6.3). As we are responsible for four groups each containing about 25 student teachers, we would have about 100 student teachers altogether to work with. These students would have about 25 mentors to facilitate their school-based practice.
From the coming study year, 2007/2008, we could start implementing the action research cycle as outlined in 8.8 within in a group of about 125 future teachers and teachers, in addition to 2 teacher educators in RE, and, if they agree, 2 teacher educators in Mathematics, 2 in Norwegian and 2 in Pedagogy. The purpose of this work would be to encourage participants to value and respect the expertise of practice and develop a better pedagogy for ITE.

8.10.1 Rationale for new AR cycles based on SOL/LC

SOL and the process of LC challenge participants to engage in self-study activities by initiating reflection about personal strengths and weaknesses. According to Austin and Senese (2004), a process of self-study is important for teachers to find who they are as individuals. The underlying assumption is that how one teaches and what one teaches is a product of who one is and what one believes to be true (Austin and Senese, 2004: 1236). I would argue that participating in activities embracing all the stakeholders in ITE, student teachers, mentors and teacher educators, allows one to gain valid insight and understanding into the process of teaching and learning to teach. In this context the question of pedagogy becomes crucial. There are reasons to believe that the development of an appropriate pedagogy for teacher education can

only be initiated if all stakeholders in this education engage in new practices where experiences and an understanding of teaching and learning about teaching take place. Loughran (2006) argues:

> …Being a part of the experience matters in a pedagogy of teacher education because it is about enacting practices that are sensitive and responsive to the cognitive and affective needs, issues and concerns in teaching and learning about teaching…(Loughran, 2006: 175)

My action research experience afforded new knowledge and understanding about the needs, issues and concerns in teaching and learning about teaching which Loughran is indicating. Reflecting upon this experience I would argue that I have constructed a new platform for myself as a teacher educator. From this perspective I realise that my practice will change dramatically because I am now in a position where I know something about the cognitive and affective needs of my students. This new position puts heavy demands on me as a professional teacher educator. I can no longer be ignorant about the calling of my students, to use Joldermas' (2001) expression. Because I know something about the uniqueness of these students, their challenges and problems, I as a teacher or teacher educator have to respond adequately to 'the obligations imposed on me by the face of the student', (Joldersma, 2001) (see 8.4 above). By sharing my experience and expertise with student teachers, mentors and colleagues, I anticipate that they will discover that the 'silent part of the world' which Joldersma (2001) is talking about, can indeed be thematized and communicated in human relationships. From this perspective and experience, I anticipate that a creative pedagogy for teacher education can be developed, a pedagogy which embraces the needs of future teachers, their mentors and teacher educators. I consider this process to be one of continuous personal and professional development.

8.11 Limitations of my study

The insight gained from this study and the findings it has produced should, however, be assessed in the light of its limitations. It was done within a limited context, involving two ITE colleges and a limited number of participants. Because of the sudden change in the organization of school-based practice, the continuity of actions had to be revised and take a new direction. But even this difficult situation allowed me to focus more on the student teachers and to include a group of teacher educators in my study. I used RE as an example in my research, which is in itself a limitation. There are, however, reasons to believe that SOL and LC could be implemented in any other subject context. Accordingly, this assumption could be tested in new action research projects.

In the present study more teacher educators should have been included in my third AR cycle, but the initiative taken to include them failed.

I assume that my strategy to involve them was not good enough. In a past review I admit that I should have invested more time in persuading them because their participation in the case study reported in Chapter 7 would probably have produced stronger data.

The implementation of new curriculum in ITE in 2003 caused a difficult situation for the continuity of my action research cycles and made it difficult to provide sufficient skills for mentors to process the LC. The survey, reported in Chapter 5 had its clear weaknesses and should have been better designed. Nevertheless it produced some useful information for my study.

8.12 Conclusion

When I started my action research project, I had about ten years of experience of preparing student teachers for the realities of the RE classroom. The limitations of the framework in which

this work took place stimulated my creativity and curiosity to investigate what we actually do and what we could do in this context.

Humanistic and positive psychology encouraged me to believe that even in constrained situations, I, a teacher educator, together with teachers of all kinds in any educational setting, can promote change and transformation.

By increasing my knowledge, I gained an improved understanding of what goes on in ITE and in human relationships in this education. This insight afforded relevant knowledge by which I could better analyze and investigate the context in which I was operating.

Action research afforded a paradigm suitable for my concerns and research questions and offered an appropriate model which I could use for my investigation. The living educational theories developed by Whitehead (2006) opened my eyes to new perspectives on practice. Inspired by this insight, I could include not only my experiences, findings and analyses in my research account but was able to describe my personal values and beliefs and create an autobiographical research presentation.

The interviews which I conducted in my quality studies, made it possible to meet and interact with student teachers, mentors and teacher educators, 38 persons altogether. For me this was an immensely educative process, in which I discovered these interviewees' commitment to the teaching profession. They had a shared vision of promoting good practice and being able to influence the lives of the people they were working with. Most of the student teachers seem to be guided by idealistic reasons for entering into this profession. My research produced this discovery, which put a special demand on me to evaluate and construct interactions with my students where these expectations can be met.

To my knowledge this is the first study which uses action research to investigate the student teacher-mentor interactions by means of Self-Organised Learning and Learning Conversations in the context of teacher education in Norway. By introducing Whitehead's ideas about 'living theories of practice' I assume that my study will contribute to a dissemination of these theories into a new cultural context. In this context, particularly in the education of RE teachers, there is a strong emphasis on human capabilities and promotion of personnel development and growth. There are few strategies, however, for promoting this development.

The teacher educators in RE whom I interviewed were all concerned about this problem, but they did not contribute new ideas for improving this situation in practice. My action research project helped me to take new actions in order to put these important concepts into action to make them real. The validity of my research has to be judged, not only on the results of my actions and the change which they produced, but also on how believable is my story of lived experience as a practitioner researcher.

As a teacher educator in RE, I strongly feel the contradiction between my values and my ability to put these values into actions. My reading, reflection and critical thinking as part of my investigation promoted a personnel change process. This process was constructively informed and influenced by taking actively part in the EC course led by Lisbeth Brudal.
In her teaching and learning activities and her interactions with course participants, I was never able to detect any contradiction between theory and practice. For me she became an important role model who was able to demonstrate coherence between the theories of PP, her expert area, and her actions. She strongly emphasized the importance for all professional to ask the following

question: ’Who is the head person in your professional context?’ and was herself a living example of ‘A pedagogy of the other, (see 8.4 above). Thus she conveyed a visual narrative which helped and inspired me to create my own personal narrative, the narrative about myself as a practitioner. As mentioned before, I was quite familiar with Budal’s question, but she demonstrated a clear and transparent coherence between theory and her practice, between what she said and what she did. Thus my learning experience became more meaningful than ever before.

Brudal’s example and the important question she asked helped to change my own mindset and I became more student-oriented in my professional life. It also helped me to demonstrate care and support for my interviewees. I am convinced that this attitude will promote the constructive implementation of appropriate pedagogies such as SOL/LC.

I believe that my study may contribute to a better understanding of the importance of good teacher-learner interactions as a precondition for learning. I also believe that this action research project demonstrates a constructive and innovative way to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

It is my hope that my study may inspire other professionals, be they teachers, mentors or teacher educators, to investigate their practices in order to improve them.
I am convinced that professionals refine their practice through ongoing inquiry, dialogue, and reflection.

Appendix 1
Empathic Communication Structure

Empathic Communication

Purpose: Co-creation of a new interpretation of reality based on free and mutual exchange of ideas and opinions

Step one: Tell me about yourself (personal narrative)

Step two: What do you feel about your narrative? (emotional awareness**)**

Step three: What do you think about your narrative? (reflection, cognitive awareness)

Step four: Would you like to hear my opinion about what you have told me?

Professional and learner/client engage in a discussion with the purpose of creating a new interpretation of reality, following the procedure outlined in the purpose

This table is modelled upon Brudal (2006) and translated into English by the researcher

Appendix 2a
1st LC Format

ANALYSESKJEMA FOR DIN PERSONLIGE LÆRINGSOPPGAVE

Navn: ……

Planleggingsdato: ……

Vurderingsdato: …….

	FØR	ETTER	FORSKJELLER	
MÅL	Hva er mitt læringsmål?	Hva var mitt læringsmål	Beskriv vesentlige forskjeller?	**MÅL**
HANDLING	Hva vil jeg gjøre?	Hva gjorde jeg?	Beskriv forskjeller	**HANDLING**
RESULTAT	Hvordan vil jeg finne ut om jeg lykkes?	Hvor godt gjorde jeg det?	Beskriv forskjeller	**RESULTAT**
SAMTALE OM LÆRINGSPROSESSEN				
STYRKE:		**SVAKHET:**		

Appendix 2b
1st LC Format

PERSONAL LEARNING CONTRACT FOR CHANGE: SOL IN ACTION

Name: ……

Date compiled: ……

Date of Review …….

	BEFORE	AFTER	DIFFERENCE	
PURPOSE	What is my purpose?	What actually was my purpose?	Describe essential difference(s)?	**PURPOSE**
STRATEGY	What actions?	What did I do?	Differences?	**STRATEGY**
OUTCOME	How shall I judge my success?	How well did I do it?	Differences?	**OUTCOME**
REVIEW				
STRENGTHS:		**WEAKNESSES:**		

Appendix 3a
2nd LC Format

ANALYSESKJEMA FOR DIN PERSONLIGE LÆRINGSOPPGAVE

Navn: ……

Planleggingsdato: ……

Vurderingsdato: …….

FØR		**ETTER**	**FORSKJELLER**	
MÅL	Hva ønsker jeg å lære?	Nådde jeg mine læringsmål?	Finner jeg forskjeller mellom det jeg ønsket å oppnå og det jeg virkelig oppnådde? Evt. hvilke?	**MÅL**
HANDLING	Hva vil jeg gjøre?	Hva gjorde jeg?	Beskriv forskjeller	**HANDLING**
RESULTAT	Hvordan vil jeg finne ut om jeg lykkes?	Hvor godt gjorde jeg det?	Beskriv forskjeller	**RESULTAT**
SAMTALE OM LÆRINGSPROSESSEN				
STYRKE:		**SVAKHET:**		

Appendix 3b
2nd LC Format

PERSONAL LEARNING CONTRACT FOR CHANGE: SOL IN ACTION

Name: ……

Date compiled: ……

Date of Review …….

	BEFORE	AFTER	DIFFERENCE	
PURPOSE	What do I want to learn? (my purpose)	Did I reach my purpose?	Are there any differences between my purposes and my actions?	**PURPOSE**
STRATEGY	What actions?	What did I do?	Differences?	**STRATEGY**
OUTCOME	How shall I judge my success?	How well did I do it?	Differences?	**OUTCOME**
REVIEW				
STRENGTHS:		**WEAKNESSES:**		

Appendix 4a
The Questionnaire, Norwegian version
Spørreundersøkelse knyttet til KRL-faget

Denne spørreundersøkelsen søker å kartlegge erfaringer og synspunkter knyttet til KRL-faget blant studenter som har gjennomført 10 vekttall KRL. Spørreundersøkelsen er ledd i Kari Flornes sitt doktorgradsprosjekt ved School of Education, University of Birmingham. Jeg garanterer full anonymitet for deg som deltar og forsikrer at data vil bli analysert og brukt i forhold til anerkjente forskningsmetoder og etiske krav. Det er viktig at flest mulig deltar og svarer så ærlig som mulig.

Del I: Personlige opplysninger

1. Alder

19-25	26-35	36-50
☐	☐	☐

2. Kjønn

Kvinne	Mann
☐	☐

Del II: Praksiserfaring

3. Hvordan vil du vurdere praksiserfaringen i KRL-faget? Gi en kort begrunnelse for svaret

Meget god	God	Dårlig
☐	☐	☐

4. Hvordan vil du vurdere samarbeidet med øvingslærer? Gi en kort begrunnelse for svaret.

Meget godt	Godt	Dårlig
☐	☐	☐

Del III : KRL-læreren

5. Ser du noen sammenheng mellom KRL-fagets mål om å stimulere til personlig utvikling og vekst og de ferdigheter og holdninger KRL-læreren har? Gi en kort begrunnelse for svaret.

Stor	Middels	Liten
☐	☐	☐

6. Gi en karakteristikk av en god KRL-lærer

Del IV: Utdanning av KRL-læreren

7. **Hvordan kan lærerutdanningen utdanne denne gode KRL-læreren?**

Takk for hjelpen!

Appendix 4b
The Questionnaire- English version

QUESTIONNAIRE/SURVEY ABOUT RE EXPERINCE

This survey seeks to investigate experiences and views among student teachers who have completed the 30-credit RE module in ITE. The survey is part of the data collection of the PhD project of Kari Flornes, School of Education, The University of Birmingham, UK.
Participants are guaranteed complete anonymity and the researcher confirms that all data will be analysed and used according to research methods and ethical guidelines recognised by the University of Birmingham. It is important that all students participating fill in this form and that answers are given as accurate as possible.

Part I : Personal questions

1. Age

19-25 ☐ **26-35** ☐ **36-50** ☐

2. Gender

Female ☐ **Male** ☐

Part II : RE experience in school

3. How do you evaluate your classroom experience in RE?
Please give a short commentary to your answer.

Very good ☐ **Good** ☐ **Poor** ☐

4. How will you evaluate your interaction with your mentor? Please give a short commentary.

Very good ☐ **Good** ☐ **Poor** ☐

Part II :The RE teacher

5. Do you see any relationship between RE's potential of stimulating personal development and growth and the skills and attitudes of the RE teacher? Please give a short commentary.

Strong ☐ **Some** ☐ **None** ☐

6. How will you describe a good RE teacher?

Part IV: The education of a good RE teacher

6. How can ITE educate this good RE teacher?

Thanks for your co-operation!

Appendix 5

Interview schedule with teacher educators in RE

IQ1

- One of the main aims of RE in ITE is to promote personal development and growth. How do you as a teacher educator perceive this aim?

IQ2

- How do you solve the problem between theory and practice, between teaching and learning within the college and RE teaching and learning activities in schools?

IQ3

- What about the framework of the RE programme, course designs and context? Do they support or impede your objectives?

IQ4

- As the multi-faith RE subject is a new construct and students are not familiar with this subject from their own schooling, how do you go about to making available to students constructive images, relevant to the construction of RE in the classroom?

IQ5

- What are the most important values and attitudes guiding your interactions with students?

IQ6

- Do you have adequate opportunities to nurture student teachers on an individual level?

Appendix 6

Interview schedule with teacher educators in Pedagogy

RQ 1

-As a teacher educator in pedagogy how do you perceive the possibilities and task to promote both professional development and growth in ITE?

RQ 2

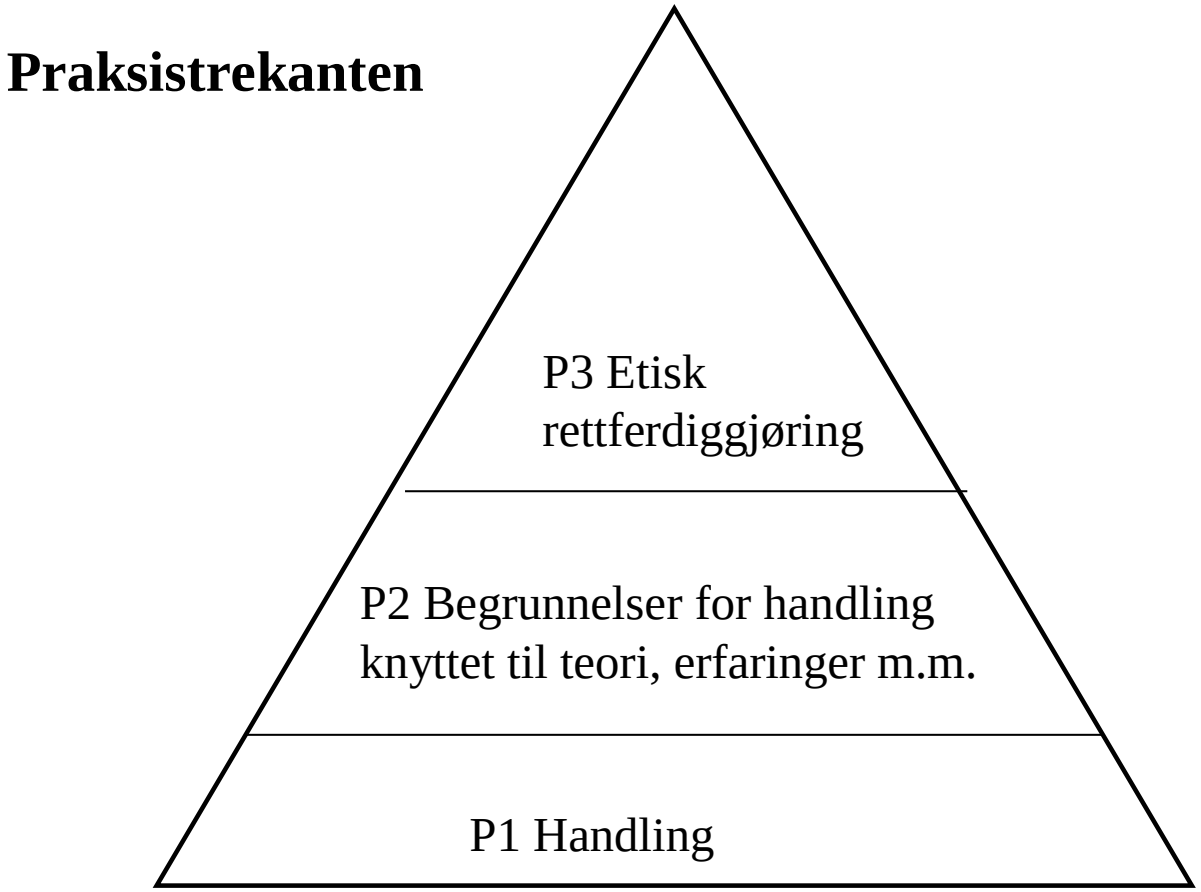
- What strategies do you implement in order to promote personal development among your students?

RQ 3

-You took part in the experience of LC. What do think about this experience?

Appendix 7

The Handal and Lauvås practice model



Handal, G. and Lauvås, P. (1982: 37)

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AFTERWORD

In this thesis I have told the story of my experiences as a practitioner researcher, who for a limited time took on the role of an action researcher researching my own practice.

I have done this in the form of a narrative which is an autobiographical account of my concerns, my reflection and my actions with an evaluation of them all.

Looking back on this experience, I can clearly see that my life as a teacher educator has changed profoundly. Through my narrative I have tried to communicate how this change and transformation were initiated and fuelled by my reading, my critical reflection and the living forms of theory.

Even though my narrative as a written text was meant to transmit and communicate what really happened in my life and the lives of the people I was interacting with, I have come to realise that a narrative, told as a research account in written form, cannot capture the whole picture of what actually happened. As mentioned in a past review, a visual narrative could have shown ‘the generative transformational potential’ of my work and I fully realise this (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 41).

On page 96 of this thesis I admit the limits of my presentation and acknowledge that a visual narrative would have strengthened the validity of my work. I also explain why it was not possible in my research procedure to produce such claims to knowledge.

This afterword, which was created as a visual narrative after the viva, opened up a chance to communicate what it means to have living epistemological standards of judgement.

This visual narrative takes the form of a DVD in which questions are asked by a colleague of mine who took part in the second LC workshop and whose students participated in the second action research cycle. My replies, as the researcher, tell my story.