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The production of a child in conflict in teacher education – research on available storylines

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ABSTRACT

Teacher education takes part in producing childhood. This is rarely discussed in teacher education. In this study, we are interested in what kinds of positions become normalised for children and youth in the discourses in teacher education. We utilise the concepts of narrative resources and storylines, looking into the storylines in which student teachers take themselves to be in, and in the positions that are opened for pupils in these storylines. The results show that a child in peer conflict is produced in problematic ways, as an ideal child or object of fixing. Teacher is produced as central and important.

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Introduction

Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)

Educators have the kind of power that the quote from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie highlights. For educators to carry the power responsibly, we must study the positions we open and close for children and youth in teacher education. This research focuses on a topic rarely discussed in the context of teacher education: the role of teachers and teacher education in the production of childhood and child. The fundamental argument of the paper is that teacher education not only produces teachers but also the child. By this we mean that the normalised truths we tell, the storylines we follow and the images we portray in teacher education have an impact on what a child in school can be and become, and what forms of agency one recognised as a child may assume. The idea of the child produced in teacher education has a direct impact on the positions and possibilities children and youth have in school and the forms, for example, student participation and democracy in school may take. In this study, we are interested in the idea of a child that becomes normalised in teacher education. Specifically, we look at the kinds of positions student teachers recognise and normalise for themselves and for children.

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Existing research shows that inequitable discourses operate through schoolteachers even when teachers operate from a belief that their practices are equitable (Gillies 2011; Hoffman 2009; McGregor 2015; Reyes and Villarreal 2016; Tuck 2012). Groups or individuals are marginalised in school through viewing and positioning them as 'other' in relation to expectations of acceptable behaviour, beliefs, emotions, appearance and indicators or markers of what is 'normal' (Juva and Holm 2017; Koskela and Lanás 2016; Lanás and Brunila 2019; Macartney 2012; Petersen and Millei 2016; Pihl et al. 2018; Popkewitz 1998; Youdell 2006). Such discourses position children as those of psychological developmental stages, gender, ethnicity, marginal, disability, etc. (Burman 1994; Taguchi 2007), and these subject positions open different (im)possibilities for agency for different children.

Simply being positioned as a child in relation to an adult, or a pupil in relation to a teacher, already impacts the kinds of agencies one may assume, and the kinds of voices one can make heard. As Popkewitz (1998, 30) stated: 'We can think of pedagogical discourses as constructing spaces for children – theories of childhood, ideas about learning and development "make" us see the child through particular psychological distinctions and divisions'. In other words, the child is not something that just *is*, but the child is discursively constructed through social interactions. Positioning shapes opportunities for student agency in schools (York and Kirshner 2015). How teacher–student interactions position students is important for dialogic classroom practices and sustaining the pursuit of intended educational outcomes (Bossér and Lindahl 2019).

Childhood and youth sociologists as well as philosophers have for long been studying how children and youth become produced in society and especially in education (Biesta 2010; Griffin 2013; James and Prout 2015). This research is, however, strikingly absent in teacher education research. Teacher education research tends to focus on teacher identities and pedagogical approaches and take the children and youth somehow for granted. Previously attention has been brought to this by, for example, Britzman (2003, 1) who stated that we 'still manage to approach development as if it is a correction for childhood' towards adulthood, or by Biesta (2010), who heavily criticises the term 'learner' for positioning children in a place in which their voice is not recognised. In teacher education research, there is a blind spot the size of a child – this blind spot is what we aim to address with this research.

We approach teacher education not simply as something being done to student teachers but rather as something they do to themselves. Teacher education happens as student teachers negotiate their interpretations of their own experiences (Britzman 2006; Lortie 1975; Rots, Kelchtermans, and Aelterman 2012), the existing systems of knowledge and beliefs on teaching and being a teacher (Furlong 2013; Taguchi 2007). These beliefs and systems of knowledge are mediated through not only official curricula, practice school staff and curriculum, and teacher educators' professional ambitions, but also student teachers' professional ambitions and personal histories, material surroundings (Lanas and Huuki 2017; Taguchi 2005), schools in which they substitute, media representations and so on. In this way, formal teacher education is formed not of official plans or the ambitions of teacher educators, but of the processes through which student teachers engage with these. These processes have been characterised as unpacking and re-packing their existing toolbox (Taguchi 2007), un-inscribing and re-inscribing meanings

(Green and Reid 2008) putting their mind-body in motion (Phillips 2010) and learning through unlearning (Cochran-Smith 2003).

To investigate the positions that student teachers recognise and normalise for themselves and for children and youth during their teacher education, this research methodologically utilises the concepts of narrative resources and storylines. Storylines can be seen as simplified threads within discourses, a way of binding various aspects of lives (subjects, events, material objects) together in a way in which they form a somewhat coherent narrative and make sense within the surrounding discourses. The storylines in which the person takes themselves to be embedded is a critical element in the process of establishing meanings (Davies and Harré 1990). We look into the storylines in which student teachers take themselves to be in, and in the positions that are opened for pupils in these storylines. We ask: *what kinds of storylines do student teachers draw from, what kinds of positions do different participants have in these storylines, and what kinds of possibilities do these positions open and close for different participants?*

Most of the decisions teachers make in their everyday work are made quickly, individually, without time to read, discuss with peers or reflect overnight. In such 'hot moments' (Harlap 2013; Hughes, Huston, and Stein 2010; Muftugil-Yalcin et al. 2023), decisions are made instinctively, based on the most immediately accessible perception of the situation. These perceptions, we suggest, are discursive, informed by available storylines and the positions available in them. In this research, we presented student teachers with a safe 'hot moment' by giving them an imaginary but realistic case description of a common situation in school and asked student teachers to comment it immediately. From their comments, we analysed which positions and storylines they negotiated and how, and what kinds of positions for children they recognised, opened and closed when doing so.

Making these storylines and positions visible enables us to inspect their impact critically. The research is significant for providing teachers with tools to investigate how their own positioning impact the child they think they see.

Conceptual tools: positioning selves and others with storylines

The concept of *subject position* provides a useful tool for thinking of student teachers as locating themselves in conversations according to the storylines available to them and bringing to those storylines their own subjective lived histories through which they have learnt metaphors, characters and a plot (see Davies and Harré 1990). As student teachers make themselves into teachers, they take on the subject position of a teacher. When doing this, they negotiate their personal experiences with surrounding discourses about, for example, school, education and teaching (and any issue associated with these). Gubrium and Holstein (2008) have referred to a similar process as 'crafting storylines' from 'surrounding narrative resources', i.e. the available stock of knowledge. Such resources build on a knowledge of social structures and the roles that are recognisably allocated to people within those structures, making some expressions, feelings, actions seem normal and acceptable, while others seem unacceptable and deviant. These social structures are coercive to the extent that to be recognisable and acceptable, a person must operate within them (Davies and Harré 1990).

The subject positions and storylines available for student teachers are historically and socially constructed. This means that 'teacher' is not something that some individuals

simply are (or are not) but something that they *do*. However, they are not free to do it as they wish but must do it within discursive boundaries. In other words, although each student teacher constructs their own idea of 'teacher', this is not an empty category for student teachers to fill as they wish but it is already loaded with storylines, competing forms of knowledge, desires and fears (Lanas and Kelchtermans 2015). The discourses, therefore, prescribe not only what is desirable but also what is recognisable as acceptable for a teacher within the available storylines (Davies et al. 2001, 172).

Subject positions give access to, for example, expectations, practices, opinions and values, and are therefore central in the construction of different understandings of the world and one's place in it. Positioning theory suggests that once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discourses in which they are positioned (Davies and Harré 1990; Søreide 2006). The position of a teacher is located within specific discourses with specific available storylines, and these discourses make claims not only about teachers but also about others, especially about children positioned as pupils. Such positionings are not (necessarily) intentional, but they are powerful.

Subject positions are continuously shifting (Allen and Wiles 2013) and relative to other positions. For example, if someone is positioned as a nurse, someone else has to be positioned as a patient (Allen and Wiles 2013), or, more relevantly for this research, if someone is a teacher, someone else has to be a pupil. In this way, as they position themselves in surrounding discourses, individuals and groups inevitably also position each other. This is crucial for this research as it suggests that as teachers position themselves as teachers, they also take part in positioning children and youth as pupils. Crucially, this means that for teachers to feel like they fulfil the position of a teacher successfully, also children will have to fill the position assigned for them as pupils. – If they fail to do so, the teacher's perception of themselves as a good teacher may be at risk.

The position of a teacher offers a specific view towards children, and this view is impacted by available storylines and powerful discourses in teacher education. McGregor (2015) offers the example of how, when making sense of school engagement, teachers tend to draw from an entirely different set of discourses than, for instance, youth workers do. She found that while teachers drew primarily on discourses of individual responsibility for success or failure and related notions of youth deficits, youth workers recognised the social and economic pressures that shape the lives of young people and, consequently, their engagement with schools. This suggests that the different expectations placed on teacher and youth worker subjects within the surrounding discourses invoke different kinds of storylines through which they make sense of the pupils' situations, rendering different aspects of the situations visible and relevant.

What may seem obvious and readily available from one position, is not necessarily so for the person in the 'other' position. The relative nature of positions can make the perception of one almost impossible for the other, in another position, to grasp. Storyline is that which the participants understand to be 'going on' or what sort of situation they are engaged in (Slocum and Van Langenhove 2004). The other is 'invited' to conform to the storyline – or, indeed, required to conform if they are to continue to converse with the first speaker in such a way as to contribute to the storyline that person has opened up (Davies and Harré 1990). Others may not do as invited; they may not

understand what the storyline is meant to be, they may pursue their own storyline, blind to the first storyline or resisting it, or they may conform because they do not feel they have a choice, but feel angry, oppressed (Davies and Harré 1990).

One example of contradicting storylines in school context could be Gillies's (2011) study. They found that whereas teachers interpreted the challenging behaviour of pupils as a lack of social connectedness, 'the challenging behaviour [the researchers] encountered was more often associated with social connectedness than its absence' (p.199). Based on their research, 'pupils emphasised a strong sense of social belonging, displaying allegiances to (amongst other things) their ethnic groups, neighbourhood, schools and even form groups [i.e. class]' (p. 199). In their research, these positions as well as the actions and allegiances from within the positions remained unrecognised in school because they were not in line with the position of a child as pupil, and they were not necessarily allegiances with school or what it represented. The available selection of positions for the pupils, and the tensions between these positions may not be visible to the teacher, as they may require understanding of cultural, societal, economic, social, geographic, historical tensions to which teachers may not have had access. The available storylines have a direct impact on how children and their actions become recognised in school, and in Gillies's study they became recognised as disconnected by the teachers, in line with the storylines available to the teachers.

Gillies's, McGregor's, Popkewitz's, Alanen's and others' researchers show how children and youth have become normalised in education through discourses and storylines that portray them in othering ways, as deficit. In this research, we wish to shed light on how they are portrayed in teacher education.

Methodological approach

This research has been carried out in a context in which teaching is considered a passion, and the interest of the child is a central value for student teachers (Lanas and Kelchtermans 2015). The context of this research is Finnish research-based class teacher education. In Finland, teaching is a rather aspired profession, and all qualified teachers are Masters of education and have completed 5 years of studying in the university. Education is free, but students are selected through an application procedure. Roughly 10–20% of applicants are accepted into the class teacher education programmes. During the 5 years, student teachers complete four internships, methodological studies, and BA and ME theses, theoretical studies and all together 60 credits of subject didactics in all school subjects. Teaching in Finland is very autonomous, teachers are highly trusted, and there are no high-stakes testing or other external means of controlling teachers. Similarly, already during the teacher studies, the manner of teaching is commonly very non-authoritarian, emphasising reflective discussions.

We wanted to gain knowledge of the positionings and storylines informing this perception in the 'hot moments'. To investigate the kinds of storylines accessed by student teachers, the kinds of positions different participants have in these storylines, and the kinds of possibilities these positions open and close for children and youth, we gave the student teachers a case to read and asked them to assess the actions of different participants in the case. The case described a typical situation in which teachers must act quickly, a conflict between pupils handled by teachers.

Data

The data was generated in 2019. We visited four different courses in teacher education, altogether five sessions. Each session had 8 to 53 participating student teachers and 2 to 4 researchers, altogether 116 student teachers and 6 researchers. Since all the researchers also teach in teacher education, the student teachers mostly knew us. All the student teachers in the classes took part in the exercise, but they could decline taking part in the research. One declined. The student teachers were given a one-page description of a case to read. The description was based on earlier research data, but it had been changed so that it was anonymous. The case was written so that it was as stereotypical as possible. To ensure this, it was checked by five parents and four special educators who had repeatedly been involved in situations similar to the case.

The case description depicted a situation in which a child (Marja, 10) had heard that another child (Jukka, 12) had spread rumours about her. Marja had tried to talk about this to Jukka in front of his friends, and he had been dismissive. Marja had asked the teacher for help, and the teacher and the principal had arranged a meeting between the children. In the meeting both children were nervous. The adults corrected Jukka for many behaviours (not looking directly at others, wiggling his leg, not speaking clearly and wearing his hat). They removed his hat from his head. The adults told Jukka there are constant problems with him, and he needs to understand he cannot behave as he wants. The described situation ended as Jukka asked 'are we done' and left. In the hall, he went to talk to Marja without the adults and said he did not mean to hurt her, apologised, and she forgave. The case description left many questions unanswered. It did not state the content of the alleged rumour, whether Jukka had actually done what Marja had heard, the home situation of either child or their relationship with each other, or their social positions in school. This way, in order to make sense of the case, student teachers had to access storylines and narrative resources.

The data analysed in this research consists of written responses to the case given by the student teachers immediately after reading the case description. Student teachers were given 15–20 minutes to answer the following three questions: What do you think of the actions of each character? Why did they do what they did? What could they have done differently? The exercise itself continued from here with peer discussion, but for this paper we have focused on the first responses, the immediate interpretations and perceptions that student teachers accessed right after reading the case, before having the possibility to reflect further or utilise any sources for reflecting (e.g. peers, course leader, internet, professional sources). We see that these responses are drawn directly from the most immediately available storylines for student teachers making sense of a situation.

The responses we received were not coherently constructed thoughts but isolated sentences. They included contradictions, unfinished thoughts and quick judgements. Since the focus was not on individual student teachers but on the positions that they recognise and normalise for themselves and for children and youth, the responses to each question were taken out of the forms on which they were written and joined together on another document. This way, all the responses invited by each of the three questions were treated as one set of data, separated from the responder and eventually also the question to which it answered. They filled 30 pages all together (Font 12, spacing 1).

Analysis

To analyse the storylines accessed by student teachers, the kinds of positions different participants have in these storylines, and the kinds of possibilities these positions open and close, we took an iterative approach. First, we categorised the responses based on what the responses *did*. Categorising the data in this way enabled asking more questions from it. We were able to identify six distinct categories. The responses:

- (1) *made suggestions* for what the characters should do, 8 pages
- (2) *criticised* the actions of the different characters, 7 pages
- (3) *explained why* the characters did what they did, 7 pages
- (4) *praised* the characters' actions, 5 pages
- (5) *wondered*¹ about various issues 2 pages
- (6) *described* what took place in the case description, 1 page.

Second, we focused on the four biggest categories. They were rich in data, whereas the last two categories were random observations. We analysed what kinds of assumptions were introduced with the suggestions, critique, explanations and praise. To do this, we read each category separately, trying to tease out the implicit assumptions in the responses in each category. To be as open as possible to different readings of data, four researchers read and worked on the same category separately and then came together to discuss what they found. As everyone presented their analysis to others, others questioned, interrogated and made clarifications to the analysis until we had initial analytic threads. These initial threads were presented to two more researchers who in turn interrogated them, made clarifications and added notes on previous research and theory.

These analytic threads originated from an observation made of the data, after which further analysis and readings were based on the observation. We thought of literature, previous research and other parts of the data that we read through and with the initial observation. The process was similar to the 'thinking with theory'-approach by Jackson and Mazzei (2012), and diffractive approach (e.g. Mazzei 2014). In it '... differences get made in the process of reading data into each other, and identifying what diffractive patterns emerge in these readings' (Taguchi and Palmer 2013, 676). In the analysis process, some readings and analytic threads disappeared while other threads became richer and stronger. Through this process, four main analytical threads emerged. Each thread originated from an initial observation in the data and became richer as the analysis proceeded:

- (1) observation: student teachers used the word 'demand' commonly, but in different ways regarding different characters (e.g. 'the teacher should demand that Jukka ...', or 'we can't demand anything from Marja ...'). In further analysis, we identified each instance in which 'demanding' appeared, listed what was demanded, and how characters were positioned in relation to demanding, eventually analysing how a character becomes normalised as a demander or a demandee.
- (2) observation: student teachers tended to explain the educators' actions with rational aims, whereas they tended to explain children's actions with feelings. In further analysis, we identified all the aims and feelings that were recognised for

each character, the role the aims and feelings were given and how the aims and feelings were contextualised.

- (3) observation: student teachers commonly used the word 'bully' and some formulation of the idea of a 'bad home', although neither of these were implied in the case description. In further analysis, we traced each instance of both and analysed what kinds of storylines and positions these notions were written with.
- (4) observation: student teachers tended to use the word 'right' as in 'he did the right thing', 'She wanted to do what is right'. We became interested in what is normalised as 'right'. We read through all the categories to identify each time 'right' is mentioned and see what was written together with it. We noted it tended to imply a script of a bullying situation 'gone well', in which all characters had pre-set 'right actions'. We then continued by identifying all direct and indirect suggestions of a script to see if we could construct an overarching script of a situation that has gone well, or if the descriptions were too multiple. We easily could.

Finally, we brought these four threads of analysis together to construct the findings.

Findings

We were interested in the positions that student teachers recognise and normalise for themselves and for children and youth, and the kinds of storylines and narrative resources that inform the appointment of positions. In this research, we found two powerful storylines, 'bullying' and 'bad home'. The educators and the pupils were positioned in specific ways in the storylines and in relation to each other, and the expectations and explanations placed for their actions were dictated by their positions. The position in which a character was appointed in the storyline had a notable impact on how and even *whether* the characters' actions or emotions were recognised.

Bullying and bad home-storylines

Our analysis of storylines showed that bullying storyline as well as a bad home-storyline were commonly utilised for filling in the gaps in the initial description. The case description left many questions unanswered. It only stated that Marja had heard Jukka spread a rumour about her, and that Jukka did not talk about it when Marja asked in a semi-public situation. In the responses, Jukka was commonly verbalised as a bully and Marja as a victim. This was often coupled with a normalised assumption of Jukka having a bad home, although the case description says nothing about Jukka's home (e.g. "The teacher should find out what is wrong with Jukka's home").

The bullying storyline included a script of a 'bullying situation gone well' that had a cathartic ending with a solution. Different responses included different parts of the scrip, but the scrip itself was completely consistent in the responses: The victim first tries to solve the situation on their own, then asks for help from an educator. The educator acts quickly and efficiently and is understanding and kind. The one identified as the perpetrator acts in a humble and respectful manner towards the educators to show they take the situation seriously. The pupils apologise and forgive in front of the educators. (e.g. 'Marja did what she was supposed to, she tried on her own and then asked for help from

an adult’/’Jukka did not show he took the situation seriously but he did the right thing in the end’/’The adults did the right thing, they acted swiftly’, ‘The situation was solved, so all went well’).

Five aspects make these storylines and the script within them particularly interesting. First, even though the script was consistent in the responses, it is not taught anywhere in teacher education, and we could not find a source in which it could be presented. This suggests that the script is learned unofficially from the surrounding discourses. Second, in the responses, a conflict between children was portrayed essentially as a threat to harmony, and restoring harmony in a predictable manner equals a ‘bullying situation gone well’. The conflict between children was not formulated as an opportunity to learn negotiation skills, listening, being heard, wondering together, or learning about difficult topics or emotions – it was first and foremost seen as a threat to be eliminated. Third, all characters in the case were praised for doing the right thing when they acted according to the script and reprimanded if they deviated from the script (e.g. ‘Teachers intervened and Jukka eventually apologised’, ‘Jukka should have shown more respect to the situation’). The educators’ task was to solve the threat efficiently and the children’s task was to submit to being solved efficiently, so harmony could be restored. Fourth, an action of a child towards another child was deemed more valuable if the adult witnesses it. Jukka’s apology was occasionally seen as a deviation from the script because it was not performed in front of adults, and it was at times seen as defective (less courageous, less authentic, less meaningful). Fifth, the bullying storyline was at times stronger in creating interpretations than the actual actions of the characters in the case: ‘the ending was unrealistic, a bully would never do what Jukka did’. This means that the position dictated the interpretation of actions.

Somewhere, student teachers informally learn a storyline in which a conflict between children is a threat and when such a threat occurs, everyone’s primary task is to restore harmony in a predictable manner, in which everyone has a specific role that should not be deviated from. In this storyline, the educator is the central figure, and the child is an object produced by the adult gaze.

Rational adults making demands to aimless, emotional, bickering children

Our analysis of aims and feelings showed that the educators and pupils were positioned very differently in relation to each other and the explanations given for their acts depended on the positions. The educators were positioned as rational and children as emotional, the victim was recognised as fragile (e.g. ‘Marja was clearly hurt and upset’), and the perpetrator was recognised as uncaring of the victim’s feelings (e.g. ‘Jukka was rather indifferent’). A possible positive relationship (e.g. crush, caring, friendship, trying to solve the issue for the benefit of both) between the children was not considered once as a storyline. Instead, the children were commonly placed in a negative, oppositional, unbalanced power-relationship that needed the educators to improve it. Even the apology offered by one pupil to another was at times credited to the adults (e.g. ‘Jukka apologised because the adults made him think’).

The positions dictated whether the characters were recognised as having aims or desires, whether their actions were explained with feelings or with aims, and which feelings were recognised. For the educators, the responses mentioned many² rational

aims but for the pupils, only the victim was recognised as having aims, and even then, only one (e.g. 'wants to solve the situation'). The perpetrator was recognised to have only a negative aim or a desire (e.g. 'does not want to be in the situation'). The educators' actions were justified with assumed aims (e.g. 'they tried to scold Jukka and surely meant well') whereas the pupils' actions were justified only with feelings (e.g. 'Marja was afraid of Jukka'/'Jukka was irritated by the situation'). There was a striking difference in how the educators' and pupils' feelings were recognised. While the pupils' feelings were more commonly mentioned, only negative feelings were recognised, and feelings were seen to emerge mainly from within them or their (bad) family. For the educators, both positive and negative feelings were recognised, and they were seen to emerge mainly from an assumed broader context (bad day, difficult history with the child, the inappropriate actions of the child).

The allocations of aims and feelings in this way is significant because it produced the educators as rational, well-meaning agents with reasonable aims, whereas children (especially the one seen as perpetrator) were produced as emotional and aimless. Educators were seen to act in temporal and social context whereas children's actions were seen as non-situational and non-contextual, emerging from within the child and their family.

Pupils should show respect to school and to hierarchy rather than to each other

Our analysis of demands and understanding showed that the expectations placed on the actions of the educators and pupils were dictated by their position in the storylines.

First, only some positions could make demands. The educators were expected to make demands to the perpetrator (e.g. 'the adults must demand that Jukka faces his actions', 'the educators must demand that Jukka takes responsibility'), while the child seen as a perpetrator (Jukka) was mentioned as the only object of demands, never as the demander – even though the responses identified many ways in which he was unfairly treated (e.g. 'The principal should not have removed the hat', 'The adults had already decided who is wrong, Jukka was not heard', 'The situation was incredibly pressuring to Jukka'). In this way, the position of the perpetrator in the storyline was not one that could demand fair treatment. The educator was not only placed as one with the possibility to demand, but one *expected* to demand ('the teacher was right to demand that Jukka focuses', 'The educator must demand that Jukka understands the situation'), and not once placed as the object of demands. The victim was neither the demander nor the object of demands. Whereas the educator was not mentioned as a possible object of demands by the children in any situation, the victim was not an object of demands in this particular situation ('In this situation we can't demand anything of Marja, she is the victim').

Second, the perpetrator was typically demanded to demonstrate understanding of his own position in relation to the teachers, not express concern or care for the victim. The perpetrator was demanded to 'understand the gravity of the situation', 'take the situation seriously', 'have a serious attitude', 'understand their own actions'. There were detailed descriptions of how this understanding and seriously taking looks like (should verbalise shame in front of educators, should take hat off, should look directly at others, should not appear irritated). Demanding that the perpetrator shows understanding of the power hierarchy in the situation rather than empathetically understands the victim's position is

important because it indicates that the power hierarchies are so powerful that they demand primary acknowledgement. It centralises the power-hierarchies in school, not the children or their needs. Furthermore, even the educator was not described as someone to understand the pupils. The educators were commonly expected to “be understanding”, but when we looked into what the educator was expected to understand, this understanding was not directed at anything. This is important because in this way, being understanding became a characteristic for the educator-character to perform in the script, not an action, and there was no one benefiting from being understood.

This shows that there is a storyline in which the educator is positioned as the central figure and demander in a school, and this storyline is powerful that it even overshadows their situational position as a facilitator of a conversation taking place between children. Although the children are the owners of the dispute, the central position of the educator and performing the position with demands was normalised as natural in the responses.

Discussion

In this study, we were interested in the idea of a child that becomes normalised in teacher education. What student teachers during their studies produce as the truth never forms one single static, coherent, unanimously accepted entity, but the truth is always in motion, contradictory and continuously rearranging itself. This means that any decision, action, feeling or thought that in one moment seems natural and right, may in another moment seem flawed or wrong. Any attempt to freeze this process for inspection is like taking a picture of a situation and inspecting the picture. The situation itself keeps moving after the snap. The momentary pictures are significant, however. Research can show potential truths, storylines, momentary pictures produced by student teachers individually and collectively. The threads followed in this research are not the only possible threads that we could have followed, but they are the ones that efficiently show the positions that student teachers normalise for teachers and pupils, the storylines within which these positions make sense, and the possibilities that these positions open and close for children in school. The research confirmed that the storylines may have even a stronger impact on interpretations than the actions of the characters, and that the actions of the characters may be assessed simply based on how well they fit a script within the storyline.

We were surprised by the authoritarianism in student teacher responses. They centred the educator and power hierarchy even more than they centred the child and their experiences. This is particularly notable since the context in which they study, Finnish teacher education, is internationally compared rather un-authoritarian. When student teachers are asked about their values, ‘child-centeredness’ is among the first ones they verbalise (Fornaciari 2020; Lanas and Kelchtermans 2015).

This research shows that teacher education is not an entirely rational process. Negotiating student teachers’ own experiences with the existing systems of knowledge and beliefs (Britzman 2006; Furlong 2013; Lortie 1975; Rots, Kelchtermans, and Aelterman 2012; Taguchi 2007) is impacted by the available storylines and the available positionings for them in these storylines. In quick-thinking hot moments, deep-rooted storylines and positions offer themselves as the first answers. This research shows that in these storylines and positionings, a conflict is a threat, educators must be able to solve conflicts, children must submit and respect hierarchy, children need educators to solve issues on their behalf,

a conflict between children means the relationship is bad, a child behaving in ways that educators perceive as negative means that something is wrong in the child's home.

Based on this research, old humanist positionings which have been criticised by childhood and youth researchers since the 1980s, are still powerful and actively produced in teacher education even in a context that prides itself for non-hierarchical approach to education. In these positionings, children are irrational and unfinished, and normalised as wild subjects in need of taming and that need to be made calm by governing (Kennedy 2006, quoted in; Murrís 2016), and that depend on the educator for aims. The child either performs the right actions or becomes the object of fixing. The educator, on the other hand, is produced as needed, central and important. This production of child is deeply rooted in the educators' understandings of education, which is still – as Britzman (2003) stated – perceived as the correction of childhood towards adulthood.

The implication of this research for teacher education is that student teachers should be taught to analyse the available storylines and critically reflect how these impact their view of the students. To analyse these positions and storylines critically, teacher education institutes should be more ready to make them visible also to student teachers. Analysing the storylines critically with student teachers is crucial because, how teachers and teacher education position pupils impact not only what pupils can *do* but also who children can *be* in school. An individual becomes a subject through their ongoing constitution in and by discourse (Youdell 2006, 35). Who one is, is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within the stories through which one makes sense of one's own and others' lives (Davies and Harré 1990). This means that the behaviours and characteristics that constitute particular subjects only come into being through the confirmation and affirmation of those who share the social space (Watson, Bayliss, and Pratchett 2013). Teachers carry the power to make our stories of children and youth the definitive ones.

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