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Not Just Surviving but Thriving On Educating and Supporting Teachers in the Current Era

—The Record of the International Symposium at Department of Child Education—

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1. Symposium synopsis and reflection

Erkki T. Lassila

(1) The purpose of this symposium

On the 28th of October 2025, at Tsurukabuto 2nd campus of Kobe university, Child Education department organized a symposium with the title 「生き抜く力を超えて、輝くために：教師育成・支援の新時代に向かって」 “Not just surviving but thriving - on educating and supporting teachers in the current era”. This symposium was arranged around the specialist presentations by prof. Geert Kelchtermans and Dr. Ann Dekeletaere from Leuven University (Belgium). Prof. Kelchtermans was at the time a visiting scholar at Graduate School of Human Development and Environment.

The presentations were done in English and excellent English-Japanese-English translation was provided by Kaori Matsuda who was studying at doctoral program at the time. The event was chaired by Erkki Lassila and Ayako Kawaji from the Department of Child Education.

To ease the participation and increase international reach, the symposium was organized as a hybrid event. It was attended by around 60 undergraduate, graduate and research students from the faculty and the presenters extended network.

As the organizer of the event, my aim was to inspire discussion and invigorate research activities on the status and future direction of teachers' work and education both nationally and internationally.

When planning the focus and content of presentations, the intention was to bridge the areas of expertise of the invited speakers and the urgent issues of teacher education and

support of early career teachers in Japan, a theme that is central to my own and graduate students' area of interest. It is also strongly tied to educational activities of our program providing licenses for early childhood, primary and secondary level teacher certifications.

(2) The transformation of view on early career teachers

Prof. Kelchtermans' presentation titled “From a deficit approach to an opportunity perspective: the need for both teacher and school development”, dealt with the issue of teacher retention and attrition; focusing on the issue of “How to avoid that good teachers leave teaching for the wrong reasons?”, the challenge to educate and keep good teachers in the profession during a time when many countries are struggling with teacher shortage.

He revisited his own past research (Kelchtermans, 2019) to reiterate the need to be critical towards what he calls the “deficit view on early career teachers (ECTs)” and instead focus on the potential of seeing ECTs an important asset for the schools and communities in which they work. This perspective is especially salient in Japan where the model for teacher's professional development and comparatively limited initial teacher education typically led to teachers being treated as less than full teachers especially during the first year comprising of mandatory in-service training (Luchenko et al. 2024).

I whole-heartedly agree with prof. Kelchtermans assertion on how moving away from the deficit view is a necessary mind shift for policy makers, teacher educators and mentors to provide effective and sustainable working conditions in schools. This theme is especially important in Japan where teaching is often seen as a last resort job, and the

government is pushing for the increase of second-career teachers especially in secondary education.

(3) The reflection through learning portfolio

Dr. Ann Deketelaere's presentation titled "Supporting reflective experiential learning during practicum: the potential and pitfalls of the portfolio" provided a more practice-based angle supporting pre-service teachers.

She introduced (deep) reflection as an essential skill and attitude for (student) teachers' professional development, more their experiential learning during teaching practicum (Deketelaere, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009). Detailing how a learning portfolio can be used as a powerful pedagogical instrument during and beyond practicum, provided a good point for reflection for us Japanese teacher educators to examine our own approaches towards utilizing portfolio in our program (Deketelaere et al., 2006, 2007).

Whereas they are often mainly used as tools for assessment, prof. Deketelaere showed how via approaching it as a learning tool frees it from being merely a tool for documentation and instead positions it as a locus of both internal examination and communication with significant others in teacher education. She advised adjusting the amount of structure depending on the level of the learners and underlined the need to communicate well the rationale of the portfolio to students as well as using it meaningfully and repeatedly within the program (Deketelaere et al., 2009).

(4) Comments from Japanese perspective

Following a short break, it was time for comments and questions by the designated discussant by prof. Koichi Yamashita (Department of Child Education, Kobe University). Unfortunately, unable to join the event itself, his written and translated questions beforehand were handed to the presenters before the session. His comments and questions on prof. Kelchtermans' presentation concerned the way how agency, networks and social media can help ECTs rediscover the appeal of teaching during a time when the image of the profession is quite depressing, comparing ways of how initial support for ECTs is provided in Europe and Japan and if there are systems of easing the new teachers into the profession such as team homeroom teaching, where the administrative and planning burden is shared between colleagues. For Dr. Deketelaere's presentation, the questions hoped for concrete examples of information found useful for reflection and how the portfolio is used as a tool for communication through concrete examples.

Summing up the symposium, the perspectives discussed struck a good balance between, personal and structural,

theoretical and practical, individuals looking for meaning and their own agency and approach within the wider structures of schooling. Instead of leaving with clear-cut answers or solutions the issues discussed, the participants likely left with more good questions to ask and renewed sense of things to critically question. The latter goes especially for poorly informed government policies around teacher education and induction.

Although not directly at the focus of the presentations, there was a strong narrative undertone present. Stories using teachers own voices retain the messiness and complexity of teaching, allowing us to deal with the vulnerability that underpins the profession and make learning more personal (Kelchtermans, 2009). Here portfolios and other similar approaches can shine. Stories are also useful for promoting an important balance to rational and logical thinking. For those interested in the emotional dimension of becoming a teacher, I recommend reading Kelchtermans' and Deketelaere's 2016 handbook chapter on the topic.

Beyond discussion, the event prompted the creation of a key list of words connected with teacher retention, attrition and support, since we found that many concepts did not transfer smoothly between the languages. Working at a Japanese language program while engaging with and drawing from both Japanese and English language research literature, the difficulties and richness of living somewhere between different ways of seeing and thinking about the world of education and teaching, and searching for ways to communicate them, are always a present whether teaching or engaging in research (cf. Lassila & Hyry-Beihammer, 2024).

Listening to the discussion, I reflected upon my experiences of teaching first-year pre-service teachers about teacher's work and the challenge of talking about the work without scaring them while also preparing them to handle the often-difficult conditions of teaching. Though not yet a fully solved issue by any means there are signs of improvement. During the past few semesters, the final reports that students write at the end of their initiation course into teacher's work has shown that which typically has started as a surprise and slight panic amongst the students, has in many cases kept turning to increased motivation to develop oneself to overcome whatever challenges future may bring.

The symposium promoted a view of teaching as a deeply relational, complex and humanistic undertaking that cannot be undertaken by computers, programs nor robots in anything but the most superficial sense. Hope for better is there as long as we remember to keep reminding ourselves of the sense of meaning that only engaging and persisting with the complex task that is upbringing of the next generation can bring.

2. From a deficit approach to an opportunity perspective in supporting ECTs: the need for both teacher and school development

Geert Kelchtermans

(1) Problematizing the deficit view on teacher induction support

Teacher induction - the socialization of new members of the teaching profession in their job - has been the focus of a large number of studies over the past thirty years. With the recent worldwide teacher shortage, the research on early career teachers (ECTs) has resonated with policy makers' concerns to ensure a sufficiently large and qualified teaching force. For all these reasons the international trend to create specific support arrangements to facilitate teachers' entrance into the job obtains an almost self-evident legitimacy. Although wide-spread research attention as well as policy measures to support ECTs have doubtlessly been beneficial for teachers and schools, there have also been paradoxical unintended side effects that are problematic and in the long run even counterproductive. Most of the discourse on teacher induction and the different support programs or mentoring practices is fundamentally rooted in a form of 'deficit thinking' (Correa et al., 2015; Kelchtermans, 2019). This deficit thinking takes as its starting point that ECTs lack particular competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) to successfully deal with the challenges of the job. In doing so ECTs are being positioned as 'formally qualified, but not yet fully capable' and therefore in need of re-mediation. In this logic, the ultimate purpose and justification of support for ECTs is the re-mediation of their deficits. The different forms of mentoring are meant to repair, fix or compensate for the deficits.

It is obvious that in many cases providing additional knowledge or context information, training in particular skills or offering sustained feedback on their practice can help ECTs to better cope with the challenges they encounter in a particular school. The problem, however, is that the deficit thinking and the remedial perspective focus on an individual's weaknesses and shortcomings, rather than on their strengths and potential. It also remains unclear how, when and why ECTs move from the deficient into the competent mode, from being unfinished and unready into ready for the responsibilities of teaching. Nor is it clear how or by whom this transition is to be evaluated.

At the same time the deficit perspective uncritically takes for granted the positive contribution of the mentor and is unable to see that the very nature of the mentoring

relationship is quite often part of the problem rather than its solution. Both research and experience show that the taken-for-granted benefits of individual mentoring are much less self-evident than assumed (see e.g. Langdon et al. 2014).

To overcome the limits of this deficit perspective, the very idea of ECTs and teacher induction needs to be re-thought, reconceptualized and revised. Below I will present three alternative "subjectivities", representations to frame ECTs teachers and their induction. These representations can not only overcome the limitations of the remedial perspective, but actually open up new avenues to conceive of teacher induction in a richer, broader way: the ECT as an actor or agent, as a networker and as an asset.

(2) The Early Career Teacher as an Agent

ECTs do have agency: the human capacity to interpret and judge the particular situations they find themselves in and to act upon this sense making. Based on my narrative-biographical work, I have argued that, throughout their lives and experiences as pupils, students and student teachers, ECTs have developed a 'personal interpretative frame-work', a set of cognitions and beliefs that operates as a lens through which they observe, give meaning to and react to experiences, situations and conditions in the teaching job (Kelchtermans 2009).

This framework includes a particular understanding of themselves as teachers (professional self-understanding), which encompasses their motivations, their normative beliefs about what they ought to be doing and achieving as teachers, as well as the issues that enhances their self-esteem. Furthermore, it entails their subjective educational theory: the technical know-how (knowledge and skills) on how to achieve their professional duties.

This implies that ECTs' agency not only refers to their capacity to successfully perform their job, but equally to the value-laden judgements and sense-making processes informing their practice, as well as their (un)willingness to act in particular ways or to acknowledge where they feel less capable to achieve what they strive for or what they are expected to do. As such the processes of sense making and agency inevitably reflect normative views on what constitutes good teaching or a good teacher. And these views may differ between schools or between groups of staff members.

When trying to find their place in a school, ECTs will need to negotiate and navigate the normative views of the school, while at the same time balancing one's loyalty to one's own beliefs. In other words, teacher induction also has a (micro)political character, as it requires 'strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts seek to use

their resources of power and influence to further their interests' (Hoyle 1982, p. 88). An important part of ECTs' agency is directed towards establishing or protecting what they consider necessary or desirable working conditions.

In my own research on the micropolitics of teacher induction, I observed that being able to live up to one's deeply held beliefs about good teaching (self-interest) as well as getting the social recognition of being a proper teacher from colleagues and leadership constitute crucial professional interests for ECTs (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002; see also Kelchtermans, 2017; Kelchtermans and Vanassche 2017; Lindqvist & Kelchtermans, 2025; März & Kelchtermans, 2020; Marent et al., 2021), which will strongly shape their actions (see also Curry et al. 2008).

(3) The Early Career Teacher as a Networker

The idea of teachers as negotiators and sense-making agent leads almost automatically to this second alternative subjectivity: actors are socially embedded. Teacher socialization during induction always happens in a particular school, with a particular principal, particular colleagues, students. This implies that ECTs' agency is always situated in complex social relationships: the individual actor is actually an inter-actor. ECTs cannot but deal with students, principal, colleagues, parents, school board, local community and - in terms of support - the mentor teachers (Kelchtermans, 2017; Lindqvist & Kelchtermans, 2025).

These relationships are intrinsic to and even constitutive of the profession: there is no meaningful reality as a teacher without 'others' in the school. Fox and Wilson (2009, 2015) illustrate how ECTs engage in creating, maintaining and activating networks with others inside as well as outside the school to deal with the challenges of the induction phase, to become socially recognized as colleagues and to develop a sense of belonging. This implies that the ECT is not primarily seen as an isolated individual, with particular characteristics or competencies, but rather as 'networked': structurally embedded in a web of relationships, on which they can draw for resources and support (März & Kelchtermans, 2020; Marent et al., 2020).

(4) The Early Career Teacher as an Asset

For too long the concern with helping individual ECTs cope with the challenges of the induction process has blinded researchers and policy makers to the obvious fact that new teachers can make valuable contributions to the school and as such turn out to be 'an asset to the school and community, to be valued and nurtured as part of workforce renewal and the future of the profession, rather than as a drain on resources'

(Johnson et al. 2016, p.75). In any case, ECTs bring contemporary knowledge of theory and practice resulting from their recent sustained engagement with them during their teacher education.

A first way in which the ECT can be an asset for the school is what I would call the 'Alice-in-Wonderland' effect. ECTs bring a fresh pair of eyes. They observe, inform, wonder, question what has been taken for granted for so long by their more senior colleagues, and can ask simple but revealing and thought-provoking questions: 'why are you doing this?', 'in a former school where I did an interim job, they had a very different way of dealing with this that might be interesting?', 'if you're not happy with these situations or practices, why not consider trying to change them?', 'does it really have to be like this? What if ...?'. To benefit from their 'wondering gaze' principals and colleagues only need to be open, listening, and willing to think and make explicit what they consider obvious and self-evident for new perspectives to open up.

Secondly and contrary to the assumption of the deficit thinking, ECTs themselves think and feel they can contribute to the school's benefit. They most often have established a sense of confidence, self-esteem and purpose that motivates them to start their career (Correa et al., 2015; Woodgate-Jones, 2012). Ulvik and Langørgen (2012) asked Norwegian ECTs themselves and concluded that:

there are three particular areas in which beginning teachers feel they contribute to a greater extent than more experienced teachers: (1) having new ideas and being enthusiastic; (2) digital competence; and (3) understanding young people, because they have more common frames of understanding. (p. 49)

Thirdly, the presence of ECTs can constitute an important source of professional learning for the senior staff in the schools and in particular for their mentors. In my own work, I have argued that in the mentoring process both the mentor and mentee find themselves 'in front of the mirror' (Deketelaere et al., 2004), referring to the intensified and public nature of the reflection that is involved in the mentoring interactions. In order to answer questions, provide feedback or give advice, mentors find themselves challenged to be precise in their wording, careful and therefore thoughtful.

In other words, mentoring proves to be a powerful learning opportunity for the mentor as well, as they inevitably are stimulated and triggered to engage in what I have called both broad and deep reflection (Kelchtermans 2009). In order to contribute to teacher development, reflection should not be confined to instrumental 'how to' questions.

Striving to improve the effectiveness or technical mastery of one's pedagogical practices is of course a legitimate aim of

professional development, yet on the condition that the content of one's reflective attention is broadened to include the ethical dilemmas or moral choices, the emotions as well as the political issues of power and influence that are at play in particular situations.

At the same time, the reflection should also be deeper, moving beyond the level of action to critically address the underlying knowledge, beliefs and goals (personal interpretative framework) on which one's choices for action are grounded (Kelchtermans 2009). Engaging in a mentoring relationship triggers this broad and deep reflection and thus creates a rich opportunity for professional learning for the mentor, often including self-critically re-examining taken-for-granted ideas or aspects of the workplace.

(5) Embracing the win-win in teacher and school development

Critical analysis of the deficit thinking and remedial perspective in much of the ongoing mentoring or support arrangements for ECTs almost automatically leads to the conclusion that some things need to change. The message does not have to be that induction support or mentoring programs should be abandoned, but rather that they would benefit from radical, self-critical analysis of the validity of their implicit assumptions. Embracing the alternative representations (subjectivities) of ECTs implies seeing the broad potential for professional learning and school development that arrives with those new colleagues. Acknowledging their expertise and treating them as sense-making agents who represent rich networks and bring valuable ideas and practices to the school does more justice to ECTs than the re-medial perspective. At the same time, it no longer positions them as in need of remediation, but rather stresses their positive potential, creating opportunities for ECTs to have positive experiences that contribute to their self-confidence and social recognition, to find out for themselves where their weaknesses are and seek the appropriate help to deal with them.

Eventually schools need to be places where individual teachers can experience success in their job as well as get opportunities to further develop professionally. And this applies not only to ECTs, but equally to their more experienced colleagues. For school leadership this constitutes an important agenda for school development: for example, seeking to understand, embrace and publicly recognize teachers' expertise and commitment as an asset to the school and creating structures for support as well as opportunities to contribute to the collective expertise of the school team. In short: organizing schools in such a way that they provide working conditions that allow teachers to be thriving instead of simply surviving.

3. Comparison with Japan Towards Empowering Teachers : *Comments from the symposium discussant*

Koichi Yamashita
Kaori Matsuda

(1) Words of Deep Gratitude and Welcoming

First, I express my utmost respect and gratitude for two excellent presentations. Although I should offer more words of praise, it is not my intention to increase Ms. Matsuda's workload as interpreter. So, I am sorry to keep my remarks brief.

(2) Regarding Dr. Kelchtermans' Report

1) What Constitutes a Contemporary Manifestation of the Opportunity Perspective Approach?

I wholeheartedly agree with the fundamental principle proposed by Dr. Kelchtermans: shifting from a deficit approach to an opportunity perspective approach in supporting new teachers.

My first question concerns the practical feasibility of realizing this fundamental principle. In advanced industrial countries, particularly Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom, the teaching profession has failed to demonstrate its appeal to young people, it's difficult to keep teacher candidates motivated to become early career teachers (ECTs). In Japan, the poor working conditions of teachers have been consistently criticized over the past two decades. Some discourses for improving working conditions rather cause bad impression that "schools are not good workplaces," which makes young people have low motivation and pride to become teachers. Students in our department are not an exception.

On the other hand, globally in the modern era, especially with the development of social media, it gets rapidly easier for younger generations to get recognition from others and feel fulfilled. Of course, this has both positive and negative aspects, but focusing on the positive for now, we can see that younger generations are seeking the joy of living, not in isolation but in solidarity.

In this context, we could hope that new teachers themselves might rediscover the appeal of the teaching profession through their fresh perspectives and share it on social media. Regarding this hope—specifically, the rediscovery of teaching's appeal through ECTs, and the integration of agency, networks, and social media—what are your thoughts, Dr. Kelchtermans? Alternatively, I would greatly appreciate any insights or advice you might offer based on your

experience.

2) Support Systems for New Teachers in Europe

My second question concerns direct support systems for new teachers. In Japan, a support system for new teachers is formally legislated and uniformly applied nationwide. It is called the Initial Teacher Training Program. Primarily, this program assigns a mentor teacher to each new teacher individually, which can also be seen as a mentoring system. It is said that this program also provides opportunities for new teachers to gather across schools. They voluntarily share their working environments and challenges, evaluate/acknowledge/reflect on other's experiences, which promote their energy for the next day. It can be called an opportunity to form spontaneous and informal peer support. Many new teachers value the effectiveness of this peer support.

Compared with this Japanese system, how are new teachers typically supported in European schools you are familiar with?

3) Structures for Welcoming New Teachers into the School Organization

My third question concerns the characteristics of European schools, compared to Japanese schools, regarding how they accept new teachers as assets. In Japanese schools, particularly public elementary schools, the high cohesion among teachers of the same grade level (keeping “step in unison”) and the abundance of school events (sports days, cultural festivals) can increase resistance or anxiety from senior teachers toward newcomers, leading to more opportunities for rigorous guidance.

Simultaneously, however, these structures also provide more opportunities for the school organization to integrate them. Furthermore, in recent years, a new system called the team homeroom teachers system has been introduced. This involves multiple teachers, sometimes on a rotation basis, handling multiple classes within the same grade level, rather than having a single homeroom teacher.

This system, often combined with a subject-teacher system, aims to reduce the burden of lesson preparation for inexperienced new teachers. It also allows them to learn through apprenticeship-like observation of senior teachers' responses to various challenges posed by students. Furthermore, it seeks to avoid attributing problems arising within a grade level group to the responsibility of any single new teacher, aiming instead for shared responsibility.

Given this context, how are opportunities to integrate new teachers as members of the organization prepared in European schools you are familiar with? I would greatly appreciate hearing about the general situation and structure.

(3) Regarding Dr. Deketelaere's Report

1) Examples of Portfolios as Reflection Tools

Next, regarding Dr. Deketelaere's presentation, I have a great interest in how effective and significant the concept of portfolios is as tools for reflection during practicum.

My first question concerns detailed information about the portfolio as a tool. This question consists of three parts. First, since a portfolio is a collection of diverse types of work, it might be difficult to specify, but could you please explain further, ideally sharing examples, about what specific information it contains and what types of information is effective for their reflection? Second, if possible, please also explain specifically how the university engages with student teaching through the portfolio. Third, if possible, please provide us examples of communication through the portfolio, such as actual conversation examples from Online portfolio, Online feedback, or Reflection Seminars.

2) “Lesson Planning” in European Student Teaching: Compared with Japan

My second question concerns the fundamental structural differences in “lesson planning” between Europe and Japan and its relationship to practicum.

Generally, lesson planning in Japan proceeds very systematically through the following stages:

- a) Establishment of a national curriculum by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which carries strong prescriptive force as a social norm.
- b) Development of the school curriculum at each school to enable the completion of the national curriculum within the academic year.
- c) Provision of free textbooks and detailed teacher's manuals to ensure the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom.
- d) Creation and execution of lesson plans for each class, based on the use of those textbooks and manuals.

During practicum, student teachers, under the guidance and support of their supervising teachers, spend considerable time developing lesson plans. Sometimes other student teachers also help creating these lesson plans. When the student teachers teach a class, the supervising teacher, other teachers from the same school, and other student teachers may observe. Afterwards, the supervising teacher may provide feedback to the student teacher on points for reflection and improvement, or the student teacher may discuss these with other student teachers.

I also think that these lesson plans in Japanese practicum could be one of the tools for “reflection,” as pointed out by Dr. Deketelaere. While getting additional explanation

and comments from Dr. Kawaji on the validity of this interpretation, I would greatly appreciate it if Dr. Deketelaere and Dr. Kelchtermans could provide additional insights and comments regarding the existence and form of lesson plans in Europe, as well as how lessons themselves are constructed, in contrast to lesson planning in Japan.

3) The 'Record of Practicum' in Japan

My third point is less a question and more an introduction to this Japanese practicum, similar to the portfolio, along with a joint research request.

In Japanese practicum, student teachers often fill out a booklet called the 'Record of Practicum' daily. For example, in our department, students write quite detailed daily records throughout their practice. Collaborative teachers provide comments on these entries. This document serves as a field where the student teacher's reflections on their daily practicum unfold, and it also functions as a dialogic log commented on by the supervising teacher, who shares the practicum context and possesses extensive teaching experience. I prepared actual examples to share with you.

My question is whether this document could serve as a starting point or reference point for a portfolio as a tool for reflection in Japanese practicum. I would appreciate any comments or questions. Furthermore, this is less a request and more a proposal: I would be delighted if we could collaborate on an international joint research project involving Dr. Kelchtermans, Dr. Deketelaere, Dr. Kawaji, Dr. Lassila and me. This project would explore the potential of writing culture within practicum, specifically examining this 'Record of Practicum' which could be termed a Japanese-style portfolio.

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