Summary

Culturally sensitive teachers
The development of professional qualities of prospective teachers in culturally pluriform schools

The teaching supposes a relational, interpersonal connection to the pupil rather than a technical one, oriented towards applying instrumental knowledge and skills. This relationship forms the normative-reflexive core of the teaching profession. This relational perspective offers a pedagogical basis with which to design an educational learning process in a manner that makes sense to the pupils and thus to cope with the cultural plurality in school in an adequate, context-sensitive manner. This is the underlying hypothesis of this thesis, in which we subject the development of professional qualities in prospective teachers in a culturally pluriform society to a conceptual-theoretical and empirical study.

Teacher education in the Netherlands has traditionally devoted attention to this aspect. Generally, this attention is phrased in terms of context-specific supplementary professional skills, centred around the question of how students can best be prepared to work in schools that are increasingly being filled by pupils for whom Dutch is not their first language and who belong to other religions and worldviews than the established philosophical and social orientations from which the culture of the general population originated in part. Traditionally, the emphasis in teacher training—which traditionally had a programme- or discipline-oriented pedagogy—lay consequently on the context-specific supplementary technical equipping of the students to deal with topics like counteracting the educational disadvantages incurred during early childhood education, coping with cultural and religious differences at school while assuming that they are partly to blame for the development of the disadvantages, or the supplementary didactics of Dutch as a second language. With the implementation of competency-oriented education (cgo) in the training courses, and especially after this was combined in a hybrid didactic model with the new knowledge bases, little has changed in this technical-instrumental, programme-specific orientation to the curriculum, despite all of the initially practice-oriented conceptual intentions of the cgo. The attention paid to these aspects is subsumed under ‘coping with differences (cultural)’, which is included as a generic designation in the different competency domains and is generally considered a means to or precondition for obtaining the objectively measurable learning results of all pupils, regardless of (or sometimes despite) the possibly inhibiting effect of the pupils’ cultural-religious background. The IPABO university of applied science, where the empirical part of this study is situated, is no exception.
In educational research and theory formation, there is a comparable situation.

A large amount of research data is available which handle in different ways the question of how prospective teachers can be prepared to work in pluriform schools or ones with a high concentration of ethnic minority pupils, and which competencies are required. Here, too, the emphasis lies, partly under the influence of the prevailing politico-social and pedagogical discourse oriented towards reducing uncertainty and compensating deficits, generally on the technical equipping of prospective and incumbent teachers. The focus lies, for example, on the question of how the effectiveness and result-oriented aspect of educational learning processes can be improved in schoolclasses with deprived ethnic minority pupils with poor language skills, or on the question of ‘what works’ in countering educational disadvantages and ethnic-religious segregation in education.

In the last few years, research into teacher training has undergone an evident shift from a technical orientation on the teaching profession with the associated focus on obtaining an ‘objectively’ measurable result of the education, to a more pedagogical orientation, in which the pedagogical relationship with pupils and the normative-reflexive principles of the pedagogical actions of teachers have risen to prominence. The increased scientific interest in the pedagogical view of the teaching profession is partly due to the revival of so-called narrative research in pedagogical theory formation and pedagogical research, an approach in which the relationship between the professional identity development of teachers and their life story or learning history forms the common focus of a wide range of interpretations of the key concept of ‘narrativity’. Characteristic of this broadened perspective in the research into the development of the professional qualities of prospective teachers is generally the question of what individual personal and vocational value the meaningful experiences within but especially outside the context of the training add to the formation of prospective teachers as pedagogical professionals and what the importance is of the underlying, (professional) identity-forming ideals and stories constituted on the basis of these experiences. The aspect still missing from these studies, however, is explicit attention for the training of teachers for pluriform schools in which coping with the cultural differences is considered in the broader perspective of the pluriform society for which they are being educated, and then not so much as a means to or precondition for obtaining the slender learning results, but as an aim in itself, as the primary goal of education. There are currently few research data available offering insights into the link between the vocational value of the training in the development of pedagogical qualities for working in pluriform schools on the one hand, and the importance of personhood -forming experiences in the development of the professional identity of prospective teachers on the other.

These considerations and our own experiences in supervising students formed the impetus for our study. In it we are examining the vocational value of the training and searching for the manners in which the training to prepare prospective teachers for the pluriform society builds on their learning history. An important characteristic of this approach is the dialectic interaction of the educational value of the training and the influence of the edifying processes taking place outside and the transformations occurring during that edifying process. With this study we want to make a con-
ceptual-theoretical, empirical and practical contribution. In the design of our study, the distinctive domains to which we wish to contribute are in line. Given the open, qualitative nature of the research question and the study’s orientation to theory and terminology development, the conceptual-theoretical and empirical parts of the study are not strictly separated linearly from each other. Theory and empiricism stand in a dialectic, reciprocal relationship to each other, because we assume they influence each other constantly, work on each other and regulate each other. Nevertheless, we distinguish three subparts in technical design terms. First of all, an objective theoretical exploration, in which we further elaborate the problem and define the key terms of the study. As a second step, we develop a conceptual framework, in which these terms are elaborated further and defined more precisely. Finally, in the empirical part of the study, the conceptual-theoretical elaborated terms are grounded in empirical data. This design reflects the meaning-oriented, open character of the hypothesis; we start the study with an open and globally formulated research question. The intention is that this research question, depending on insights gained in the meantime, can be formulated increasingly better and more precisely in the course of the study with the aim to better understand the problem, the object domain and the key words of the study. Consequently, after many transformations, we will only be able to formulate the definitive version of the research question in the phase of the final analysis of the empirical study. The broadly formulated research question with which we are starting this study is:

How do the professional qualities of students at the IPABO university of applied science develop, which are required for their future career in pluriform primary schools, in an environment in which besides the education, external personhood-forming and vocational experiences and the associated politico-social influences play a role?

The first chapter describes the first phase of the study, in which we determine the research context by sketching the setting in which we position the two domains of the research object. One domain is formed by the teaching profession in a pluriform society, the other by the pedagogical developments implemented in the teacher training colleges, focused on the specific research setting of the IPABO university of applied science. In light of several factual characteristics and manifestations of cultural pluriformity, we first sketch a broad setting, in which the major themes and controversies regarding the pluriform nature of society and the school are given a place. We study the outlines in the politico-social and academic debate on pluriformity, as we think the students experience it. Subsequently, we discuss the wide-ranging positions and the standpoints assumed under three common denominators. The first main thread, which we call cultural-religious pluralism, stands for a collection of diverse opinions with the common characteristic that they are linked to the striving for an ideal society in which cultural-religious plurality and group-oriented participation in it are key. The second main thread in the debate, which we label neonationalism, can be considered one of the answers to the question of the meaning of Dutchness in the given context of the multicultural society. Thus, neonationalism can be considered a reaction to the ideology of multiculturalism and to the visible street scene of cultural-religious pluriformity in the Netherlands. We use the term here as a collective label for diverse opinions in the integration debate on the rela-
tionship between the state and its citizens and among the citizens themselves, with the common denominator being that ethnic minorities in the Netherlands should fit in and identify with the Dutch national culture and national identity. In egalitarian cosmopolitanism, the third main thread we distinguish, it is not cultural-religious differences and the group-oriented participation in society that are the focus, but rather the individual equality of citizens, regardless of their ethnic-cultural and religious background characteristics. Nationalism is also rejected here categorically; the associated citizenship concept and the membership of the nation are replaced here by the ideal of the world citizen with the closer, concrete, political goal of European citizenship.

Following on from the three main threads, we discuss which concepts of good education and good teaching in pluriform schools can be derived from the distinctive positions in the politico-social and academic debate and how these concepts relate to diverse variants of the pedagogical discourse on good education and good teaching. We consider three strategies distinguished by Wardekker and Miedema (2001) for designing educational learning processes in relation to dealing with the diversity in culture-linked assigning of meaning present at school, namely: pluralistic strategy, preclusion strategy and equality strategy. Following on from these authors, we distinguish right across these strategies two concepts of knowledge and culture transfer used when establishing the educational learning processes at school and regarding the role of the teacher, namely: transmission conception and transformation conception. Then we focus this image on the specific research context of the IPABO university of applied science and study the pedagogical developments arising in that narrower setting. Analogous to the structure of the broad setting, we discuss only factual characteristics and manifestations of the pluriformity at the IPABO university of applied science. The yield of the field exploration conducted against the background of this broad and this narrow setting is formed by two terms that are key to this research: professional identity and cultural sensitivity.

In chapters 2 and 3, in the second phase of the study, we subject these two terms to a conceptual-theoretical appraisal. One aim is to define more precisely the key terms that we shall subsequently use as sensitizing concepts, when setting up the empirical study (Blumer, 1969), as ‘spotlights’ when designing an interview guideline and in the further process of collecting theory-oriented data. But we turn the reciprocal relationships between the two terms into the object of our conceptual exploration. The binding element is provided by the term learning biography, in the context in which the learning history, its assigning of meaning and its interpretation are key.

In chapter 2 we focus on the term professional identity as the first sensitizing concept. In this chapter we develop a number of cornerstones of a learning biography orientation on professional identity, in the form of an adjusted conceptual framework, based on conceptual-theoretical insights that we derived from our examination of two concepts of a teacher’s professionalism (external perspective) and two perspectives (internal) on the development of a professional identity. The starting point of the first, technical-instrumental concept of teacher’s professionalism is the goal-oriented approach of the professional and the goal-means thinking underlying the actions.
Characteristic of this concept is the conviction that when organizing the educational learning process, in principle everything must be calculable and manageable, and that when organizing educational learning processes with a correct (in other words value-neutral) use of advanced techniques, the aim should be to maximise the desired effects and minimise the uncertainties. The second, normative-reflexive concept of teacher’s professionalism arose in reaction to the technical approach to education. The emphasis lies not on the technical-instrumental role of the teacher as transmitter of knowledge, but instead on the processes of assigning meaning in education and the associated, inherent, value-linked, normative-reflexive nature of the teacher’s actions. Building on these two concepts of teacher’s professionalism, there are two perspectives on the development of professional identity in teachers, on how they see themselves as professionals. The first, cognitive perspective is based on the fundamental principle that the thinking of teachers, their practical knowledge and the practical theories based on them guide their actions in practice to a great extent. Research into the professional identity development from a cognitive perspective is partly rooted in the so-called teacher thinking research, which from the mid-1980s, in response to the teacher’s behaviour-oriented studies, argues for granting a significant place to the practical knowledge, convictions and concepts of teachers (including prospective ones). Later, the focus in research turned to ‘the teachers’ stories’ (narrativity) in the development of their professional identity. The second, biographic perspective takes the narrativity, especially the life stories of teachers (including prospective ones), as the exclusive domain in the study of the professional development of teachers. Rooted as they are in an interpretative tradition, these studies (especially that of Kelchtermans) are based on the common fundamental principle that human actions as meaningful actions are partly determined by a person’s life history or biography, and thus by experiences from the past and expectations of the future.

A closer examination of the term professional identity, based on a critical appraisal of the two discussed concepts of teacher’s professionalism and the two perspectives on professional identity, resulted in a modified conceptual framework, in which we elaborated a learning biography orientation to professional identity. In this orientation—based on two cornerstones, a hermeneutic-narrative cornerstone and a cultural historic cornerstone—the key terms are learning history and narrativity. The term learning history represents the transformations that occur in the development of the personal and professional identity. These transformations follow as a result of changing orientations on the world, on society, on education, etc., and these changing orientations also incite changes in the way prospective teachers see themselves as a person and as a professional. Learning and assigning meaning to that learning change not only these prospective teachers’ concepts of the world, of society, of education, etc., but also their concepts of themselves as people and as professionals. Narrativity emphasises the narrative and temporal nature of these changes, with which teachers express their personal and professional identity in the context of their learning history, making their own story.

In chapter 3 we enhance our conceptual framework by exploring in more detail and defining more precisely the term cultural sensitivity as the second sensitizing concept, partly embedded in the theoretical constituents of the term ‘professional
identity’. After having first clarified the term ‘pedagogical sensitivity’ (in terms of coping with individual differences), we subject the term cultural sensitivity to a more detailed conceptual exploration on the basis of the insights obtained in chapter 2, according to two visions on education, a technical vision and a pedagogical vision. This choice is partly based on the conceptual-theoretical insight that, given the underlying, wide-ranging politico-social orientations, philosophical-anthropological, epistemological and developmental theoretical concepts, and their pedagogical and training-oriented translations, a clear and universally accepted description of the term ‘cultural sensitivity’ is not possible; consequently, the interpretation of this term seems to depend on two fundamental orientations on education and on the interaction between them. First of all, it concerns diverse orientations on the aim of education, and thus on the key tasks that the school must fulfil, containing the hidden concepts on the function of ‘knowledge’ in learning processes, in short, orientations on what we have called meaning systems; second, it concerns diverse orientations on cultural differences.

For the orientations on meaning systems, we distinguished two concepts, which we label ‘meaning’ and ‘sense’ after Leont’ev. The goal of education in terms of ‘meaning’ is to assign meaning to the objective world. Given this aim, the key aspects in education are the transfer of objective knowledge (objective meanings) and the realisation of an objectively verifiable learning performance; Wardekker and Miedema talk about a transmission perspective on education. Underlying this concept is a certain rationalistic portrayal of mankind and a corresponding technical-rational concept of education and the teaching profession. The competency-oriented training (CGO), at least in its current hybrid design (combined with the knowledge bases) as technical-programmatic control instrument, forms a didactic variant of this aim. The goal of education in terms of ‘sense’ is the assigning of personal meaning to the objective meanings and thus the personality and identity development of pupils and students in training. This concerns what Wardekker and Miedema call the transformation of general cultural meanings (‘meaning’) by the pupils into their personal meaning systems (‘sense’). From ‘sense’ as a core task of education, the objectified cultural meanings (‘meaning’) consequently are not left outside, but are instead connected to the personal assigning of meaning (‘sense’) of pupils and students. The aim ‘sense’ appeared to be more closely related to the pedagogical vision on education, the teaching profession and the curriculum of the teacher training colleges.

Regarding the interpretation of the term ‘cultural sensitivity’ from orientations on cultural differences, we also distinguish two orientations. First of all, we distinguish an orientation in which ‘coping with cultural differences’ is primarily considered a means and a condition to realise the true goal, namely realising better learning performances for all pupils, regardless or despite culturally determined shortcomings that the pupils developed in preschool. Given the emphasis on objectively verifiable learning performances in education, this deficit approach to dealing with cultural differences appears to show a close resemblance to the aim ‘meaning’, with the associated underlying technical vision of education and with the politico-social position in the debate that we labelled structural-egalitarianism in chapter 1. Second, we distinguish an orientation in which ‘coping with cultural differences’ is con-
sidered a *aim in itself*, in which the appreciation of cultural differences, critically learning to deal with personal cultural-religious backgrounds, and searching for a balance between communality on the one hand and diversity on the other become topics of education, concerning coping with both differences in the classroom and the relationships in society in general, to which education is trying to contribute in this way. This perspective on education seems to have more overlap at the politico-social level with what we called *cultural pluralism* in chapter 1.

Further exploration of the term ‘cultural sensitivity’ from the two specified visions on education resulted in an elaboration of the constituents on which these visions are based and the derivation of two specific conceptual and educational programme interpretations:

- from the *pedagogical vision*, we describe cultural sensitivity as a pedagogical quality in terms of *context sensitivity* and an associated multiperspective, (society)critical, contra-intuitive attitude, with which students learn to cope, and help their pupils to cope, with the moral, politico-social and worldview dilemmas inherent in growing up in the learning and living environment of a pluriform school;

- from the *competency vision* (that is, the technical-instrumental interpretation of the term competency), we describe cultural sensitivity as a competency with which prospective teachers learn to cope with individual differences between pupils that are connected to cultural-religious background characteristics. ‘Cultural sensitivity’ is used here as a collective term for *context-specific*, supplementary professional qualities of a teacher, aimed at levelling as much as possible the culturally determined individual differences of the pupils on the basis of standardised performance criteria and watching for uniform *output characteristics*, in order to create equal opportunities for all the pupils in the class.

To finish off our conceptual exploration, we weigh the aspects and come to a refinement and sharpening of the previously roughly formulated research question as expressed in three research questions. Our empirical study starts from these three questions.

The third phase of the study is characterised by the empirical foundation of the two key terms, which we have given conceptual-theoretical constituents. In chapter 4 we describe the research procedure and account for the qualitative design of the study and the choice for the *Grounded Theory* as a research strategy. The design is arranged around the ‘learning biography’ as central point of departure for the research method with which we collected data from a total of 11 fourth-year students (trainee teachers), in two *goal-oriented* selected and assembled cohorts. A key aspect is the cyclical manner in which we conducted learning biography talks in two stages in each cohort, supplemented with findings from video-recordings in the schoolclasses where the students were working as trainee teachers and of the relevant final interview. This formed a total of 33 talks. We also analysed the collected data in two analysis rounds that built on each other: *constant comparative analysis* and *narrative analysis*.

Chapter 5 focuses on the course of the process and the results obtained from the *constant comparative analyses* (CCAS), which were conducted during the cyclic process of data collection. This concerns the mutual (*cross-case*) comparison of *all respondents*, with the aim to uncover the manner in which respondents interpreted their cultural
sensitivity: how they thematize of their teaching profession in a pluriform society. The outcome is formed by six themes and dimensions of these themes, conceived as the empirical constituents of cultural sensitivity, which together form the analytical framework of the study: ‘coping with cultural pluriformity’, ‘professional identity’, ‘pedagogical ideals’, ‘sources of contra-intuitive development’, ‘concepts about good education (as student: training level)’, ‘concepts about good education (as teacher: primary school level)’. It supports at the same time the explored and precisely defined terms in both conceptual frameworks (the conceptual-theoretical constituents) with the outcomes of the analysed data (the empirical constituents). First we describe the comparative analyses on three levels through which the analytical framework developed. The first level (CCA-1) is concerned with the selection of substantive terms (open codes). Building on this, at the second level (CCA-2) we cluster these terms around meaningful axes in categories. At this point we halt briefly to consider the findings from the two analyses from the first round interviews (LINT-1). Based on the outcomes of this mid-term review, we formulate several new (technical-analytical) research questions and design an interview guideline for the new (respondent-specific) round of data collection (LINT-2). Comparative analyses on the third level (CCA-3) produce six themes, based on the now visible links between the categories. Finally, before the last level of the constant comparison of the mutual relationships between themes and underlying dimensions (CCA-4: interface analysis of the empirical constituents), we show how the study of the second cohort has progressed and which empirical findings (new categories) this cohort produced. In conclusion, we formulate a number of ‘preliminary’ conclusions on the basis of the discovered links from this interface analysis and in the light of the three research questions.

In one of the conclusions the insight is stressed in the interest of the transformations manifesting in the personal and professional identities of the respondents and in the development of their practice theories. Not all identified cross-links between the empirical constituents (coping with cultural pluriformity, pedagogical ideals, orientations on meaning systems, etc.) appear to display a neat linear image as was apparently the case in our original conceptual-analytical outline based on the discovered links. According to the context and the position and the role taken by respondents, this suggests continuously changing orientations on life and coexistence and concepts about teaching, learning, etc., in short, changes in the images that respondents nurture about themselves as people and professionals. Another conclusion concerning the pedagogical implications that we bind to the interface analyses concerns the distinction into two manifestations or profiles of cultural sensitivity: a ‘transformation-oriented cultural sensitivity’ (profile 1) and a ‘transmission-oriented cultural sensitivity’ (profile 2).

In chapter 6 we describe the course of the process and the results obtained from the narrative analysis done after conclusion of the data collection process and examine again the findings from the CCAs and the associated conclusions on the level of each individual respondent. The narrative analysis strove to answer adequately the three key research questions in the empirical study, by focussing on the level of each individual respondent (within case). Thus, in several aspects, the analysis fulfils a supplementary, deepening and where necessary correcting function, and illuminates what was not
strongly revealed in the constant comparative analysis (due to the paradigmatic nature of that type of analysis, i.e. uncovering empirical links). This concerns in the first place the *time dimension* (temporality and narrativity), which is important when studying the respondents’ *learning history*. As a ‘product’ of the analyses carried out, this resulted in *learning biography profiles* for all respondents that were organised as ‘thick descriptions’ per respondent based on the analytical framework (themes, dimensions and categories). As a good example of the narrative analysis, we elaborated in detail the learning biography profile of one respondent (Joris) in the report. With the narrative analysis, we also conducted a thematic interface analysis, but this time at the level of each individual respondent. The findings in terms of the common narrative characteristics from the interface analyses for each individual respondent separately resulted in refinement of the earlier two profiles of cultural sensitivity, derived from the CCAs and supplemented with a third profile: a ‘hybrid manifestation of cultural sensitivity’. These three profiles, to be considered narrative counterparts to the empirical links derived from the CCAs in their refined form, also serve a pedagogical interest: based on these three profiles, we show how the education can link to the differentiated profile characteristics and training needs of groups of students. Depending on the interface analyses conducted and given these three profiles of cultural sensitivity, we formulated a number of supplementary conclusions about the ‘anatomy’ and the course of development of the cultural sensitivity and the possible implications of this for education. One of the important conclusions, which corrects an earlier conclusion from the CCAs, concerns the ‘edifying value’ of the training. In contrast to what a conclusion from the CCAs suggested, the narrative analyses showed that the training did make a substantial contribution to the professional training of the students as prospective teachers and to the development of their cultural sensitivity, and that it had different effects on different groups of students. The training ensured that the ‘profile 1’ students with a ‘transformation-oriented cultural sensitivity’ also tend to take on a form over time that has more the characteristics of ‘profile 2’, namely a ‘transmission-oriented cultural sensitivity’.

In the concluding chapter 7, we examine the results of the study by looking back and forwards. First, we formulate several final conclusions in the light of our three research questions, linked to the insights obtained from both analysis rounds of the empirical study, and we discuss how these conclusions relate to the insights that we earlier based on our conceptual-theoretical explorations. This revealed that most conceptual-theoretical assumptions remain, while we have to refine further or reject a number of insights on the basis of the empirical findings. One of the conclusions that match the conceptual-theoretical insights reads as follows: an adequate term for the course of development of cultural sensitivity can only arise when it is studied in the light of the insight in two constituents: the learning history (transformations through learning, narrativity, assigning meaning, and temporality) and the ways in which the empirical characteristics of the term cultural sensitivity are related to each other and influence each other on the level of the individual respondents. We build on this by formulating a conclusion related to the pedagogical positioning of cultural sensitivity; it states that it is not sensible to talk of cultural sensitivity as *competency*, as the current interpretation does.
Given these conclusions and the two hypotheses that we formulated, in this chapter we finally examine the question of what the obtained conceptual-theoretical and empirical insights mean in practice for the teacher training courses. We sketch several influences on the training curriculum from a pedagogical perspective, with a recognizable place being reserved for the pedagogical interpretation of the term cultural sensitivity. We place it partly in the context of the current debate on the result-oriented culture in education and the knowledge-based, competency-oriented character of the training education in the teacher training courses. We elaborate a pedagogical perspective on two future orientations for the training curriculum: a transformative orientation on the training curriculum, in which we subject the theory-practice relationship in the training to a critical examination and suggest several revisionary building blocks. And a learning biography orientation on the training curriculum, in which we critically discuss the standard, generally technically interpreted reflection practices in the training and sketch several contours of a pedagogical vision on reflection, in which the emotional, moral and value-associated principles of pedagogical action take precedence.