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Teacher preparation for urban teaching: a multiple case study of three primary teacher education programmes

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ABSTRACT

Teacher educators wonder how to prepare student teachers for urban teaching. Beginning teachers in urban environments experience multiple challenges, such as responding appropriately to language differences and cultural diversity. This study aims to provide insight into how Dutch teachers are prepared for teaching in urban schools. A multiple case study, including qualitative analysis of curriculum documents and interviews with programme directors, teacher educators, and students ($N = 18$) from three primary teacher education programmes, showed that several aspects of urban teaching, such as considering social and ethnic differences between children and (in)equality, were not addressed, or only to a limited degree. The programmes prepared teachers for urban teaching in different ways, including (compulsory) internships at urban schools or special assignments around urban themes. Internships had particularly high value for students, programme directors, and teacher educators. Results of the study can be used to develop adequate preparation for beginning urban teachers.

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Teacher education; beginning teachers; urban teaching; teacher preparation

Introduction

The shortage of teachers is a recurrent problem in many (European) countries (Dupriez, Delvaux, and Lothaire 2016; Helms-Lorenz, van de Grift, and Maulana 2016). A teacher shortage has major implications for the quality of education and thus for the potential development of pupils (Lindqvist, Nordgänger, and Carlsson 2014). Many studies have therefore focused on the causes of the teacher shortage and ways to reduce it. It appears that the shortage is largely caused by the fact that few young people choose a career in education; many beginning teachers also leave the profession after only a few years of teaching (Dupriez, Delvaux, and Lothaire 2016; Lindqvist, Nordgänger, and Carlsson 2014). The problem of early exit and turnover of beginning teachers is especially strong in urban areas, and particularly in disadvantaged schools (Siwatu 2011). Research has indicated that beginning teachers have more difficulties with teaching in urban environments than

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elsewhere. Beginning teachers in urban contexts must deal with the issues that apply to all beginning teachers, such as classroom discipline and a high workload (Veenman 1984). In addition, beginning urban teachers must address challenges that are identified in the literature as typical for teaching in an urban context. For instance, responding adequately to relatively large differences in the classroom (language differences, but also differences in pupils' ethnical, cultural, social, and religious backgrounds) and collaborating with parents from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds appeared to be challenges for (beginning) teachers in urban schools (Gaikhorst et al. 2016; Kooy 2006; McDermott and Rothenburg 2000). Beginning teachers often enter the teaching profession inadequately prepared for the specific challenges of the urban classroom (Ingersoll, Merrill, and May 2012). This can lead to attrition from these schools and from education more generally.

Several studies have shown that adequate preparation and support can help teachers to deal with the challenges of urban teaching (Gaikhorst et al. 2016; Matsko and Hammerness 2014). For instance, the study by Matsko and Hammerness (2014) revealed that teachers from a teacher education programme with a particular focus on the urban context, for example, with internships at urban schools, considered themselves more capable of working in an urban environment. Adequate preparation for urban teaching is therefore of great importance. The purpose of this research is to obtain insight into how teacher education programmes prepare candidates for teaching in urban schools. The investigation involved a multiple case study, including qualitative analysis of curriculum documents and interviews with managers, teacher educators, and students ($N = 18$) from three primary teacher education programmes. The study was conducted in three large cities in the Netherlands. The findings from this qualitative multiple case study may help with development of adequate preparation for beginning urban teachers.

The urban context

The teacher institutes that were investigated for this study were located in three of the four largest cities of the Netherlands, namely Amsterdam (capital of the Netherlands), Utrecht, and the Hague. We refer with 'urban context' to the situation in the three cities. These cities can be characterised as urban based on their number of inhabitants, diversity, presence of big institutions and social polarisation (Fukkink and Oostdam 2016; Hooge 2008). Although Amsterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague do not have high populations compared to cities in other countries (approximately 863,000, 347,000, and 533,000 people), they can be considered to be global cities (Hooge 2008; Sassen 2002). Like many other large cities in the world, these three cities contain a high number of inhabitants in comparison to other places in the country (Fukkink and Oostdam 2016; Hooge 2008). These large cities can also be characterised on the basis of the great diversity in for example income and education levels, ethnic background and language of their residents, sharp contrasts between neighbourhoods and districts and the rich environment with a high concentration of institutions in the field of art, culture, education and economy (Fukkink and Oostdam 2016). More specifically, they are characterised by a large financial sector, many business services, the headquarters of many large (multi-national) companies and pioneering activities and achievements on a global level (Hooge 2008; Sassen 2002).

Social polarisation is typical for global cities: the residents are represented both by individuals with higher levels of education with extraordinarily high incomes who live in relatively wealthy, safe neighbourhoods and also by individuals with lower levels of education who live in relatively poor, unsafe neighbourhoods (Hooge 2008; Sassen 2002). In global cities (including Amsterdam, Utrecht and the Hague) schools with a variety of student populations exist (e.g. concentration of high or low SES or socio-economically mixed, and also more ethnically homogenous or mixed). These schools are characteristic of global cities and teachers must be equipped and supported for the situations in these schools (Hooge 2008).

Theoretical framework: preparation for teaching in an urban context

As described, research has shown that teaching in urban areas implies specific challenges for (beginning) teachers. Nevertheless, how best to prepare and provide professional development for teachers for these environments is not known. Despite several initiatives to provide professional development for teachers for urban schools, there is still a teacher shortage in urban areas and beginning teachers are more likely to leave urban environments than elsewhere (Ingersoll, Merrill, and May 2012). Therefore, further research is needed on how teachers can be better equipped for teaching in an urban environment. In order to do so, it is important to obtain a clear picture of what specific expertise teachers need for teaching in urban schools and, then to what extent and how this expertise is actually addressed in primary teacher education programmes.

Dimensions of urban teaching

Based on a review of both the US and European literature, we were able to identify seven dimensions (or areas of expertise) that are important for teaching in an urban environment (see Table 1). First is *language development*, which includes attention to second language learners, multilingualism, and differences between home and school language (Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014). A second dimension is *adaptive teaching* which refers to differentiated teaching based on social (including socioeconomic and cultural) and individual (cognitive) differences between students (Gaikhorst et al. 2016; Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014). Third, we identified *lesson content and critical knowledge construction* (Banks 2004). This dimension addresses integration into lessons of knowledge that is relevant for students' different cultural backgrounds. Critical knowledge construction refers to reflection on how knowledge is always constructed from a particular perspective. *Social processes and (in)equality* is the fourth dimension that we identified, involving sensitivity to aspects such as stereotyping, power relationships, and the social development of children (Banks 2004; Sleeter 1996). Next, *cooperation with parents* refers to the importance of parental involvement, and interaction and educational collaboration with parents from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Gaikhorst et al. 2016; McDermott and Rothenburg 2000). The dimension of *(inter)professional collaboration* refers to collaboration with colleagues at the school as well as with professionals from outside, such as from youth care agencies (Lisa Gaikhorst et al. 2014; Hooge 2008). (Inter)professional cooperation does not occur solely in an urban context; however, it is often more intensive and complex than in non-urban areas (Fukink and Oostdam 2016). In urban contexts, there is a high

Table 1. Overview of the dimensions of urban teaching.

Dimension of urban teaching	Aspects
1 Language development	Second language learners, multilingualism, school and home language (eg, Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014; Kuiken 2016)
2 Adaptive teaching	Applying differentiation, social (socioeconomic and cultural) and individual (cognitive) differences, culturally-responsive teaching (eg, Fukkink and Oostdam 2016; Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014)
3 Lesson content and Critical knowledge construction	Meaningful education, funds of knowledge, perspectives on knowledge, bias, assumptions (eg, Banks 2004; Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014)
4 Social processes and (In)Equality	Social development, racism, power relations, stereotyping, discrimination, prejudices, intercultural dilemmas, pedagogical climate, identity, norms and values (eg, Banks 2004; Codrington and Fairchild 2013; Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014; Sleeter 1996)
5 Parental collaboration	Parental involvement, educational collaboration between school and parents, differences between parents in socio-economic status, education and ethnic/cultural background (eg, Banks et al. 2001; Sleeter 1996; Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014; McDermott and Rothenburg 2000)
6 (Inter)Professional collaboration	Colleagues, network partners (eg, Authors, 2017; Hooge 2008)
7 Context of the school	Environment, neighbourhood, community, (un)safety, policy, geographic location (Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014; Sleeter 1996; Smith and Smith 2006; Matsko and Hammerness 2014)

concentration of institutions (such as youth care organisations) and professionals, which makes great demands on teachers' competencies for collaboration among various professionals (Hooge 2008; Fukkink and Oostdam 2016). The final dimension focuses on the *context* of the school and refers to aspects such as the school's neighbourhood, collaboration and dialogue with the local community, and themes such as (un)safety and municipal and national policy (Matsko and Hammerness 2014). Table 1 shows an overview of the seven dimensions and related aspects for urban teaching.

Method

This study examines how future teachers are prepared for teaching in an urban context. We investigate to what extent and how the different dimensions of urban teaching are addressed in the programmes at three Dutch teacher education institutes.

The central research question is formulated as follows:

How are future teachers prepared for urban teaching in teacher education programmes?

Related subquestions are:

- (1) To what extent and how are different dimensions of urban teaching addressed in the programmes at teacher education institutes?
- (2) How do student teachers, teacher educators, and programme directors experience the preparation for urban teaching at their teacher education institute?

Design

To answer the research questions, a multiple qualitative case study was conducted at three Dutch primary teacher education institutes. A case study approach enables to

describe and expand the understanding of a specific phenomenon in education (Stake 1995). A multiple case study approach can be seen as a primary strategy for documenting organisational processes as they unfold and it allows identifying regularities between cases, where each case confirms or rejects emerging concepts. In particular, it allowed us to compare the curricula of different teacher education institutes in order to get an in-depth understanding of how future teachers are prepared for urban teaching (Stake 1995). From the literature, we do know that, in order to get a clear picture of a curriculum, it is important to investigate both the intended and experienced curriculum (Ornstein and Hunkins 2014). Therefore, within each teacher education institute, a curriculum analysis was performed (to investigate the intended curriculum) and in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with two students, three teacher educators, and a programme director ($N = 18$) (see also Table 2) (for the experienced curriculum). The use of a qualitative approach with interviews allowed the participants to describe in detail their experiences with the preparation for urban teaching within their institute.

Participants

The method used to find and select participants for the study was purposive sampling. Participants were selected only from teacher training institutes that were located in the largest cities of the Netherlands, with the expectation that these institutes specifically prepare their students for teaching in an urban context. Furthermore, we selected participants from three different institutes in order to obtain a more complete picture of students' preparation for urban teaching. From each institute, only students from the final year of the educational programme were selected, since these students have an overview of the entire programme.

The characteristics of the institutes and participants can be found in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Ethical considerations

All participation in the study was voluntary. Participants received both an information letter and a consent form. All participants signed the consent statement and none of them withdrew from the study.

Data collection

The interviews lasted about one hour and were held at the institutes on a face-to-face basis. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for coding. The interviews consisted of three

Table 2. Overview of the respondents.

	Institute 1 ($n = 6$)	Institute 2 ($n = 6$)	Institute 3 ($n = 6$)	Total ($n = 18$)
Programme director	1	1	1	3
Teacher educator	3	3	3	9
Student teacher	2	2	2	6

Table 3. Characteristics of the teacher training institutes.

	Institute 1	Institute 2	Institute 3
Student teachers	471	520	478
Teacher educators	65	40	39
Programmes (duration)	Full-time (4 years) Part-time (4 years) Abbreviated part-time (2 years) Academic teacher education (3 years)	Full-time (4 years) Part-time (4 years) Abbreviated part-time (2 years) Digital teacher education (4 years) Digital teacher education (2 years)	Full-time (4 years) Part-time (2 years) Academic teacher education (3 years)

Table 4. Characteristics of the respondents.

Respondent	Gender	Age	Years of experience (within institute)	Involvement in course/programme
<i>Institute 1</i>				
Programme director 1	F	40–49	5	
Teacher educator 1.1	M	50–59	7	Mathematics
Teacher educator 1.2	F	40–49	17	Teacher research
Teacher educator 1.3	M	50–59	> 25	Pedagogy
Student teacher 1.1	F	< 25	Study year 4	Full-time
Student teacher 1.2	F	< 25	Study year 4	Full-time
<i>Institute 2</i>				
Programme director 2	M	30–39	2	
Teacher educator 2.1	F	50–59	11	Pedagogy
Teacher educator 2.2	M	> 60	9	Language/Dutch
Teacher educator 2.3	M	> 60	13	Language/Dutch
Student teacher 2.1	F	30–39	Study year 4	Part-time
Student teacher 2.2	F	25–29	Study year 4	Part-time
<i>Institute 3</i>				
Programme director 3	F	50–59	6	
Teacher educator 3.1	M	30–39	2	Language/Dutch
Teacher educator 3.2	F	40–49	11	Pedagogy
Teacher educator 3.3	F	50–59	9	Pedagogy
Student teacher 3.1	F	40–49	Study year 4	Abbreviated (2 years)
Student teacher 3.2	M	40–49	Study year 4	Abbreviated (2 years)

parts. In the first part, the interviewer started with some general and open questions about the institute's vision of and preparation for urban teaching. This gave the researcher an idea of how the preparation on urban teaching was conceptualised, prioritised, and organised within the institutes, which made it possible to contextualise the research findings. The second part included questions on the seven dimensions of urban teaching drawn from the literature, such as language development and adaptive teaching (see also Table 1). The interviewer asked to what extent and how (different aspects within) these dimensions were addressed in the programmes. Finally, in the last part, the interviewer asked respondents to elaborate on their experiences with the preparation on urban teaching at their institutes. To supplement the interviews, institutes' curriculum materials were also collected (35 documents in total). These documents included study guides, curriculum manuals, annual reports, and strategic plans.

Data analysis

The data analysis was an iterative process of reading and re-reading of the data, by selecting and coding (data reduction) and by displaying the data in within-case and cross-case

matrices (Miles and Huberman 1994). The data were coded (in Atlas.ti), in which both 'in vivo' and 'a priori codes' were used. The final coding scheme was thus a result of codes based on our conceptual framework and our research questions as well as inductive codes. A code was assigned to each dimension of urban teaching drawn from the literature (such as *language development* or *social processes and (in)equality*). Furthermore, sub-codes were created for each aspect within these dimensions (for example, *second language learners*). Codes were also inductively created for the type of preparation at the institutes (such as *urban internships*). Lastly, codes were assigned to the participants' experiences with the preparation for urban teaching. Fragments related to the same dimensions were grouped and summarised in cross-case matrices in order to discover particular patterns. When patterns were found, we deliberately searched for disconfirming cases and patterns (Miles and Huberman 1994; Robson 2002). This led to more nuanced explanations.

The interview responses were read and coded by the first author. Because of the interpretative and iterative nature of the data analysis, it was not possible to determine inter-rater reliability (Akkerman et al. 2008). To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, multiple researchers were involved in the analysis. Descriptions of the codes and illustrative data extracts were discussed within a research team of four researchers. These researchers had backgrounds in both qualitative research and the field of (teacher) education. Furthermore, for the coding process, the following procedures were followed:

- (1) All fragments that were difficult for the coder to code were discussed with another experienced researcher. These fragments and codes were discussed until consensus was reached and the coding was adjusted to reflect the outcome of this discussion.
- (2) The first author's interpretations were audited by a procedure whereby the codes for two (randomly chosen) scored interviews (10%) were checked and discussed in a peer review by two other experienced researchers (Miles and Huberman 1994). There was 100% agreement on the assigned codes.

Besides the coding, also the data matrices (for the within- and cross-case analyses) and the different phases and decisions in the research process were checked and discussed with the other co-authors (Akkerman et al. 2008). Furthermore, in order to prevent ourselves from drawing conclusions too early, we repeatedly read the data and checked in the original data several times. We also used direct quotes from the interviews to illustrate and support our findings.

Results

The institute's vision of urban teaching

In order to contextualise the research findings, the interviews started with some open questions concerning the institute's vision of urban teaching. At institutes 1 and 2, no specific and integral vision was formulated for teaching in an urban context. Nevertheless, several respondents indicated that the institutes did attend to several aspects related to urban teaching, such as addressing diversity. For instance, the programme director at institute 2 stated: *'No, not [a vision] specifically of teaching in an urban context. But when it*

comes to diversity, then subjects such as students' behaviour and learning problems are our focus.'

Several respondents indicated that an important reason for not having an explicit vision for urban teaching was that the institute prefers more general teaching preparation, because many of the students come from places outside the city and will be employed there as well: *'This [vision] is not specially focused on the urban context. And that is because we are a teacher training institute in a large city, however, our students also come from places outside the city and will be employed there too.'* (programme director 2).

At teacher training institute 3, however, there was an explicit and integral vision for urban teaching, which was reflected in both the curriculum materials and the interviews. In the manual for the full-time programme, the following vision was formulated:

Teaching in a highly diverse urban environment ... demands high quality teachers, [our institute] sets itself the following mission: [we] bring together the current knowledge and expertise about primary education to prepare teachers for [the city] ... we want to ensure that all pupils ... receive the best teachers: teachers who make a difference, teachers who have faith in each child and never give up.

As with institutes 1 and 2, the students from institute 3, do not always come from large cities; however, in contrast to institutes 1 and 2, within institute 3 the teachers and the programme director did underline the importance of preparing their students for this specific urban context. The programme director at institute 3 explained this as follows:

Look, what I want is that they obtain experience in schools here in the big city. Many students are from outside the city, and when we say 'you are going to the city', they think it is incredibly scary ... We think that you should immerse yourself in the diversity of the big city. And that you have to examine your own prejudices. And that you should start to see that all kinds of children are living here who can benefit incredibly from good teachers. So ... you can be of great significance.

The dimensions of urban teaching (research question 1)

The specific outcomes for the seven dimensions of urban teaching are discussed in the following sections.

Language development

The dimension of *language development* was integrated into the curricula for all three teacher training institutes. This dimension received a lot of attention, as indicated by teacher educator 3 from institute 3: *'Language development, yes, that has a lot of attention, right from the beginning.'* Within this dimension, attention was paid in the programmes to vocabulary development, multilingualism, second language learners, and differences between home and school language. This last aspect was described as follows in a course description for year 1 from institute 1: *'The process of second language acquisition is also discussed. How does a child actually acquire a second language? What similarities and differences are there between native language acquisition and second language acquisition?'*

The institutes addressed children's language development in separate courses ('Language' or 'Dutch'). Furthermore, institute 2 provided students with a special minor on second language learners ('Dutch as a second language'): *'We have a minor on Dutch as*

a second language (...). Thus, students who have an affinity with this topic can follow this minor.' (teacher educator 2, institute 2).

Adaptive teaching

All institutes addressed adaptive teaching. The focus was mainly on differentiating based on *cognitive* differences between children, and less on other aspects such as social or cultural differences that are specifically relevant for urban schools: *'We still have a tendency to focus on children's cognitive results. You just have to deal with these [cognitive] differences, what do you see in the classroom and which [level of] groups can be made.'* (teacher educator 1, institute 2). In other words, adaptive teaching was framed from a cognitive rather than a social or cultural perspective by the respondents. For example, this was visible in the fact that this dimension was especially discussed during language and maths courses, according to participants. The focus on this adaptive dimension was mainly in the latter years of the programmes (in years 3 and 4), and thus the focus was mostly on differentiating for the lower-performing students. However, at institute 1 there was also a special track in which students can specialise in teaching higher-performing students ('Talent development and Excellence'). At institute 3, students had to develop a lesson package for higher-performing children.

Differences between children were approached positively at the institutes, according to participants. Teacher educator 3 from institute 3 stated this as follows: *'Attention is paid to differences between children ... dealing with differences is not looking at what children's problems are but focusing on their possibilities and talents.'*

(Inter)professional collaboration

All teacher training institutes integrated the dimension of professional collaboration into their programmes. According to participants, much attention was directed to school internal collaboration (with colleagues):

[Collaboration in the school], yes, ... that you are part of a team [...] you also have to collaborate with your fellow students. Yes, it is not only mentioned, you also practice this in the form of an assignment in which you really had to work together as if you were a school team. (student 1, institute 2)

The collaboration dimension often recurred in the curriculum materials. Several group assignments were included in which students had to collaborate with each other. Furthermore, there were internship assignments, and all institutes had an assignment in which students had to set up a new school together.

However, the results from both the interview and curriculum analysis showed that collaboration with external actors, which is specifically relevant for urban teachers, received less attention than working with colleagues within the school. Institutes 2 and 3 did invite guest speakers from youth care and/or pupil care to introduce students to these fields.

Collaboration with parents

According to participants, all teacher institutes paid attention to collaboration with parents, to a limited extent. Within this dimension, the main focus was on parental conversations, and not on such aspects as parental involvement and educational

collaboration. There was no explicit attention to considering the different backgrounds of parents. Institute 2 had plans to make improvements in this respect in the next year:

Yes, we will do this next year, in year 2, then the students will seek contact with parents. They will visit parents of different nationalities and also look at what are those backgrounds [...] and how do teachers respond to this in practice? (teacher educator 2.1)

The institutes addressed parents mostly in the third and fourth years of their programmes. This was mostly in the form of internship assignments in which students had to join in parental conversations. Furthermore, at institutes 1 and 3 students had to practice parental discussions in a role play (with an actor).

Lesson content and critical knowledge construction

In two of the three institutes, some attention was paid to the integration of knowledge that is relevant to students' different backgrounds. According to participants, at institutes 1 and 3, students were explicitly encouraged to use examples from the diverse cultural backgrounds of children in their lessons. One lecturer stated this as follows:

For example, I say: If you give examples, during your internship in [the city area of] Amsterdam-West, and you are going to discuss a calculation assignment. There, Mr. Jones says: 'Buy two kilos of ham.' [Then I say] No, replace that immediately. If you start with such a context, then all the kids say: 'Well, ham, I do not eat that, [it is] not halaal.' Then you have lost all the children. (teacher educator 1, institute 1)

Nevertheless, connection of the lesson content to children's' diverse backgrounds did not appear in the curriculum documents from teacher education institutes 1 and 3. At institute 2, it appeared from both the interviews and the curriculum document that almost no attention was given to connecting the lesson content to students' diverse backgrounds.

According to participants, critical knowledge construction received only a limited amount of attention at the three institutes. This dimension was mainly discussed during history lessons, when the idea that certain topics can be discussed from different perspectives was introduced.

At institute 2 there was also a special track, 'Diversity and Critical Citizenship', in which '*we first introduce students to the idea that knowledge is socially constructed and therefore always carries the perspective of the maker of the teaching method*' (teacher educator 2, institute 2). Attention was paid to how students can apply critical knowledge construction in practice '*... what we always ask from the students is to take into account the social construction of the lessons in their activities with children and thus include multiple perspectives, different perspectives in the subject than, for instance, the method provides.*' (teacher educator 2, institute 2). However, according to one student at institute 2, no concrete instructions were given on how to apply this critical knowledge construction in practice.

Context of the school

The institutes addressed the context of the school to a limited extent: '*We had one lesson on how to include the context of the school in your geography lesson ... However, not much attention is paid to this ... No, not at all [for the urban context]*' (student teacher 2.2). The programme director of institute 1 stated:

What we notice within our institute is that we are all professionals and very much focused on our own subject, and we therefore sometimes do not bring in the context from the outside enough, and we make too little room for discussions [of the conditions] that exist within big cities.

There was attention for the aspect of (un)safety, to a limited extent: *'Well, very limited, safety in your classroom [is included in the programme]. ... I mean, to create a positive atmosphere and to make children eager to learn and curious'* (student teacher 1, institute 3).

Furthermore, there was some attention for the geographic location of the school; however, no tools were provided to students in order to disentangle and/or make use of the school context:

You will be expected to give a description of your student population during internships. But that remains, yes, on quite a theoretical level. I mean, yes, you can say that your group consists of 40% Moroccan children and 20% Turkish and 20% Dutch and 10% Hindustani. But what that really actually means or what influences it has in your classroom, yes, there is simply not the time to go deeper into it (student teacher 1, institute 3).

Policy was an aspect within the context dimension that recurred implicitly in different assignments, for instance, when students had to create their own school.

Institute 3 paid explicit attention to the *urban* educational context in their programme by requiring internships in urban schools. The study manual for the internship described this as follows: *'Students do at least one internship at a school with a high percentage of students at risk or a [...] inner city school with large diversity in the pupil population.'* According to participants, students experienced what it is like to teach in a diverse urban context by doing these urban internships.

At the other institutes, students were not obliged to do internships in urban schools. For instance, student teacher 1.2 indicated: *'Actually, I only had internships in villages.'* Teacher 1 at institute 2 stated: *'In the past, we had the requirement for students to do an internship at a school with a lot of diversity, ... but that is no longer included in the programme.'* Students from these institutes indicated that they would appreciate internships in different (urban) contexts, and to discuss their experiences with students from internships in other (urban) contexts:

But I think that if you spend a little more time on that there are just big differences. East [of this city] is completely different from West, North and South is also completely different. And if they pay a little more attention to it, what would be nice is to just let people speak who then have an internship in West or have an internship in South (student teacher 1, education 1).

Social processes and (in)equality

According to participants, there was some attention for the dimension of social processes and (in)equality. The main focus within this dimension was on social processes. Aspects such as group processes, social development and the pedagogical climate were addressed mainly during pedagogy classes (during the entire programme of study). However, the participants reported that little attention was paid to social (in)equality, and related aspects such as racism, power relations, and stereotyping. The institutes did give some attention to this aspect, but according to participants, this was more accidentally discussed in the lessons and did not explicitly appear in separate courses: *'No, not within courses. This [inequality] is only when your mentor discusses this.'* (student teacher 1.1).

To conclude, the analyses showed that all the dimensions of urban teaching that we identified in the literature, were reflected in the curricula of the three teacher education institutes. However, the extent to which these different dimensions were addressed differed. More specifically, the dimensions of language development, adaptive teaching, and (inter)professional collaboration appeared to receive more attention in the teacher education programmes than the dimensions of lesson content and critical knowledge construction, parental collaboration, social processes and (in)equality, and context. Furthermore, the results showed that several urban-related aspects within these dimensions were not addressed, or only to a limited degree.

Furthermore, no new categories/dimensions emerged from the data that did not fit to the dimensions that we identified in the literature. This result, in combination with the outcome that all the dimensions from our theoretical framework were reflected in the curricula of the teacher training institutes, is a valuable insight, in the sense that the framework appeared to be comprehensive.

Experiences with preparation for urban teaching (research question 2)

The results of the study showed a discrepancy between programme directors and teacher educators on the one hand and student teachers on the other hand regarding their experiences with preparation for urban teaching. Where programme directors and teacher educators had positive experiences in general, the student teachers did not always feel sufficiently prepared for urban teaching. Several students noted a lack of explicit knowledge about the cultural, ethnic backgrounds of their future students in their programme: *'Sometimes things are just missing, particularly in terms of backgrounds and differences between pupils.'* (student 1, institute 1).

A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that programme directors and teacher educators were aware of the fact that they cannot fully prepare teachers for the complexity of urban teaching, and saw this as a joint responsibility of both teacher education and (urban) schools, whereas students preferred to be prepared for urban teaching by their teacher training institute. For instance, the programme director of institute 1 stated:

... that you no longer say that we are only responsible as training institute and you are from the schools, so you are from the practice [side] ... but you say we all have to join forces and see how we can together ensure that we become better teachers who provide better education that children in [the city] ... can benefit from.

Although programme directors and teachers were predominantly positive about the preparation at their institutes, like the students, they unanimously agreed that the dimension of *collaboration with parents* was insufficiently integrated and should receive more attention at their institute: *'... parents must get more attention, really look at what parents can do for the development of their child and how I [as a teacher] can work with that diversity of parents.'* (teacher educator 1, institute 2).

A final important result was that student teachers who did an internship at an urban school judged the preparation for urban teaching (at their teacher training institute) more positively than students who did not do such an internship. An internship at urban schools was perceived by students, teacher educators, and programme directors as

a very valuable way to prepare teachers for urban teaching. Teacher educator 3.3 referred to the value of an urban internship as follows:

... after a half-year internship we started talking to them [student teachers] again and then they were so positive and then they said: 'Oh, it does not matter at all, they are just children, and they are very nice children.' So it has always confirmed to us that we do well to just immerse them [student teachers] there, and show them to be just children, you can just work with it and it can also be very interesting to teach in this urban neighborhood.

According to the respondents, the internships helped students to develop a positive attitude and self-efficacy regarding urban teaching. However, these internships were compulsory at only one teacher education institute. At the other institutes, the students were assigned to the internship school that was closest to their place of residence, which was a missed opportunity, according to participants. Student teacher 2.1 indicated:

I would have liked it, an internship in the city in the second or third year [of the study programme]. ... I am not inclined to work in a big city now ... I would have felt more confident. Yes. (...) Also because you do hear that in the big cities there are the most jobs and so they need the most people, that's the way I mean it. So then I think, yes, then it is actually a missed opportunity.

Conclusion and discussion

This study aimed to provide more insight into teachers' preparation for teaching in an urban environment. The study, which was conducted at three different Dutch primary teacher education institutes, showed that some of the dimensions of urban teaching, and, more specially, certain urban-related aspects within these dimensions (e.g. considering social differences between children, (in)equality and collaboration with parents from diverse backgrounds), were not addressed or were addressed only to a limited degree in teacher education programmes, whereas we know from previous research that it is important for urban teachers to develop expertise in these areas (see, e.g. Banks 2004; Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014).

We do think that our framework with the different dimensions of urban teaching is a helpful tool for teacher training institutes to reflect on and improve their own curriculum with regard to urban teaching. This framework offers a broad picture of the different areas of expertise that teachers need to perform adequately in urban contexts. Teacher training institutes can use this framework to investigate their own curriculum. The dimensions that we distinguish in our framework are based on literature from the US context (from which much of the research on urban teaching is derived), as well as literature from the European context. We found, for instance, that for the European context, the language and adaptive teaching dimensions also play an important role in urban teaching (Severiens, Wolff, and van Herpen 2014). The fact that all the dimensions from our theoretical framework were reflected within the curricula of the teacher training institutes that we investigated, in combination with the outcome that no new dimensions have emerged from our data seems to show that the framework is comprehensive. However, the dimensions should not be seen as static and unchangeable: contexts are changing fast, specifically urban ones. Therefore we need to continuously verify whether the dimensions still cover the developments and needs in education within urban educational context.

Furthermore, this study not only showed which dimensions play an important role in teachers' preparation for urban teaching, but also provided insight in how these dimensions are actually practiced by teacher training institutes, which can serve as an example for other teacher training institutes. The study emphasised, in line with the study by Matsko and Hammerness (2014), in particular the importance of internships in urban schools. Nevertheless, from this study, it appeared that not all student-teachers (have the opportunity to) do such an urban internship. Therefore, we conclude that a valuable step forwards in the preparation of urban teachers is to require an internship in an urban school as part of teacher education programmes. This was the case in only one of the three institutes in this study.

Using a small-scale qualitative study, we were able to obtain insight into teachers' (experiences with) preparation for urban teaching. In order to be able to generalise the findings, a more quantitative, large(r) scale approach is needed. Furthermore, we did not conduct observations in this study. In future research observations could be performed in order to get more insight in what actually happens during teacher training courses (the delivered curriculum). Another suggestion for future research is that not only students but also beginning urban teachers should be included in the research group, in order to investigate the alignment between teachers' preparation and the actual challenges that teachers experience in their daily urban school practice. In addition, more research on urban teaching in European contexts is needed. Much research on urban teaching is conducted in the US context, however, teaching in European contexts also appeared to be challenging for (beginning) teachers, and seems to ask for specific preparation (Gaikhorst et al. 2016). Teachers have to be adequately prepared and supported for the situation in these European contexts as well.

Despite the limitations, this study provided some interesting insights into the preparation of urban teachers. The theoretical framework with the different dimensions of urban teaching that was used in this study is valuable because it represents a first step towards a self-evaluation instrument that can also be applied by other teacher training institutes to evaluate their programmes.

This study also attempted to contribute to the scientific debate on teacher education. In this study, two main points in the debate were addressed. First: do we need context-specific or general teacher education? In the scientific literature, several researchers have pointed to the importance of context-specific teacher education, in order to understand how the social and political contexts of schools influence both students and teachers' opportunities in urban schools (Milner 2012). Other researchers have referred to the risks of preparing teachers for particular schools and contexts, as this may narrow their views of the teaching context generally, and restrict their ability to transfer their expertise to other settings (Williamson, Apedoe, and Thomas 2016). This debate was also reflected in the teacher education institutes that we investigated. At one teacher education institute, there was a specific vision for the preparation of teachers for urban teaching. The other programmes had a more general focus, although these institutes were situated in an urban context. This choice of a more general focus is understandable: graduates will also be employed outside an urban context. We also found in this study that the dimension of *context* received little attention in the teacher education programmes. Based on these outcomes, we would like to recommend greater attention to the school context in (research on) teacher education, and we think that the concept of 'context-conscious'

teacher education instead of ‘context-specific’ education (which is often used, see, e.g. Matsko and Hammerness 2014) may be more appropriate in this respect. This alternative concept can help with focusing on the importance of teaching future teachers how to disentangle the school context and becoming aware of the fact that what happens in their school and classroom is influenced by this specific context (which is also called developing a context-conscious mindset for (urban) teaching, see Williamson, Apedoe, and Thomas 2016). Therefore, it is important to provide student teachers with opportunities for internships in different (urban) contexts, to give them the tools to disentangle and make use of the context, and to let students share experiences with students from internships in other contexts. As became clear in this study, this is not the case at this moment. Further research could also focus on conditions in those internships that enhance the development of a context-conscious mindset.

Another debated point that emerged from this study is: who is responsible for teachers’ preparation for urban teaching? Several programme directors and teacher educators indicated that, because of the complexity of urban teaching, teacher education cannot fully prepare teachers for urban teaching, and schools themselves also have a role in this, for instance by offering adequate induction. Based on current and previous studies in which the complexity of urban teaching was emphasised (see, e.g. Johnson, Kraft, and Papay 2012; Feiman-Nemser, Tamir, and Hammerness 2014), we recommend (further) development and investigation of collaboration arrangements between schools and teacher education institutes, in which each can complement and reinforce the other.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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