

Contextualising teaching. Teaching practice developed by expert teacher educators

Contestualizzare l'insegnamento. Una pratica sviluppata da esperti formatori di insegnanti

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#### Abstract

This article examines the way a group of expert teachers' educators contextualises their teaching. To this end, a qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to collect and analyse data from 30 expert teachers' educators. Grounded theory was used to conceptualise and categorise evidences emerged from the analysis of texts while stories of practices were created for each category emerged for illustration. In general, three teaching strategies emerged as means of contextualising teaching: connecting teaching to authentic experiences, aligning practices in teacher education to secondary school teaching and contextualising teaching to students' level of understanding. Lastly, the lesson each university could draw from one another and implications of the study are highlighted.

**Keywords:** teacher educator; teaching practice; staff development; teacher education; Grounded theory.

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#### Abstract

L'articolo esplora come un gruppo di esperti formatori di insegnanti utilizzi la strategia della contestualizzazione nel proprio insegnamento. Uno studio qualitativo di taglio fenomenologico è stato realizzato per raccogliere e analizzare dati relativi a 30 formatori di insegnanti in due università. Per la concettualizzazione è stato utilizzato un approccio "grounded" che ha fatto emergere un insieme di categorie dall'analisi dei testi; per ciascuna categoria sono stati selezionati frammenti di narrazione. Sono emerse tre principali articolazioni di tale strategia didattica: connettere l'insegnamento a esperienze autentiche dei partecipanti, allineare le pratiche della formazione degli insegnanti a quelle presenti nella scuola secondaria e contestualizzare l'insegnamento al livello di comprensione degli studenti. In conclusione si evidenzia ciò che, a questo riguardo, ciascuna università può imparare dall'altra.

**Parole chiave:** formatore di insegnanti; pratica didattica; sviluppo del personale; formazione degli insegnanti; Grounded theory.

## 1. Introduction

Teacher quality has been long since recognised among the most significant school related factors influencing quality of learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009; 2017; Hattie, 2009) and there is no exception for university teachers. As a result, currently universities are turning their face to setting policies and practices that can help them to professionalise their teachers. Study conducted by Gibbs & Coffey (2004) has witnessed the positive impact of university teachers with sound pedagogical training on students' learning. According to this study, universities with initial training package that demands all new teachers to go through before starting teaching were successful in creating high quality student experiences and enabling the development of knowledge, competences and skills. However, little has been known about the professional learning of teacher educators (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Swennen & Klink, 2009) although great attention has been given to policy, curriculum and practices in teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

The assumption behind professionalization of teachers of any level is to equip them with core teaching practices which are essential to their work (McDonald, Kazemi & Kavanagh, 2013). Improving teaching practice is expected to enhance students' learning process and thereby improve students' achievement.

Therefore, researching on teaching practices of teachers of different levels is worth being considered. Bain (2004) identified some qualities of outstanding college teachers. They are good at creating critical learning environment that nurtures deep and meaningful learning by students. What teachers do while teaching is heavily influenced by what they know and how they express their knowing in the teaching and learning process. Teacher's teaching knowledge affects teaching act and the way they interpret the subject matter. Teacher with deep content knowledge and sharpen pedagogical skills are praised in contextualising their teaching to the understanding level of students and at the same time in relating their teaching to their life. Teacher teaching knowledge is also reflected in teacher's treatment of ideas whether as fixed textbook or as a matter of inquiry and reflection. Those teachers who are conceiving teaching as challenging students' understanding are by far better in sustaining students' learning than those who perceive teaching as a means to transmit the basic knowledge prescribed in the course plan (Gonzalez, 2011). Lastly but not least, teacher clarity is an important variable influenced by teacher's knowledge and the way they express their knowing. According to Hattie (2009), the extent to which teachers make the intention of teaching visible to the students influences students' learning engagement and thereby their achievements.

Coming to teacher educators, their practices have been rarely documented and made public (Korthagen, Loughran & Lunenberg, 2005). Nevertheless, it is not difficult to imagine the benefits that good teacher educators might bring to the innovation and dissemination of good teaching practices. They are expected to model the teaching practices they believe in to foster learning so that their trainees can replicate the same in their later teaching. Practically, teacher educators have moral and professional responsibility to go one step in advance compared to other university teachers. Their role is not only teaching contents to students, which is common to all teachers, but also teaching how to teach the content, for which they are named as second level teachers (Swennen & Klink, 2009). Thus, exploring, conceptualising, and documenting the practical teaching knowledge of expert teacher educators will support the modelling of similar good practices by teachers and teacher educators.

With this in mind, a qualitative study aiming at exploring teaching practices of teacher educators was conducted on 30 selected expert teacher educators from Verona University (Italy) and Jimma University (Ethiopia). Using Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), 13 teaching practices emerged as core practices of expert teacher educators (Hunde, 2015). Among these, *contextualising teaching* appeared to be on the top of the list being mentioned in the stories of 25 participants with 55 times reoccurrences. *Contextualisation of teaching* stands for teacher educators' thinking and relating teaching to the context of learners so that they can gain immediate and meaningful understanding of the issues being taught.

Therefore, this article aims at reporting only the strategies used by expert teacher educators to contextualise their teaching. We used the following guiding questions in exploring and conceptualising lived experiences of expert teacher educators:

- how do expert teacher educators contextualise their teaching? What strategies of contextualising teaching could be drawn from their lived and practical experiences?
- how were experts from the two universities performing in contextualising their teaching? And what lesson could they learn from one another?

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1. The focus and the context

This article is based on the PhD dissertation produced by the first author in 2015 on the conceptualisation and modelling of expert teacher educators' teaching practices (Hunde, 2015). The original purpose of the study was to better understand the teaching practices utilized by expert teacher educators from Ethiopia – Jimma University (JU) – and Italy – Verona University (VU) – and thereby develop a teaching model for teacher educators. JU has a department of Teacher Education and Curriculum studies responsible for organizing teacher training for secondary schools. Similarly, the Department of Human Sciences of VU has the responsibility for organizing Teacher Education programs for middle and upper secondary education teachers. Teacher educators within both departments are responsible for offering general pedagogy courses while subject-area method courses are being offered by the corresponding discipline-specific departments. Therefore, the study considered both general pedagogy and subject area methods teacher educators. Teacher education programs in both contexts utilize the add on model where 5-year degree program (master's degree) is a prerequisite to apply to joint teacher education in Italy while three-year degree program (bachelor degree) is a requirement for the Ethiopian counterpart. As a result, maturity of students joining the program in the two cases differs.

In addition, both programs are trying to assess and admit only competent and interested applicants although the reality on the ground does not reflect this in the case of JU. In Ethiopia, paper based entrance examination has been nationally conducted to recruit candidates. Moreover, interviews and other further assessments are included in recruitment guideline (MOE, 2013). However, sometimes all those who applied were granted admission because of insufficient number of applicants. In Italy, computerised knowledge assessment test is administered nationally and those who satisfy the requirements could proceed to subject area assessment. As there are many applicants, there is the possibility of recruiting adequate and competent candidates (Tacconi & Hunde, 2013).

The two universities differ regarding the recruitment and professional development scheme for teacher educators. In VU, there is no decree requiring a license to teach the would-be teachers. Thus, there is no professional development package for teacher educators. The other side works for JU. From the beginning, one year on-the job training package has been introduced since 2003 to professionalize teacher educators (Hunde, 2008; MOE, 2015).

## **2.2. Methodological framework**

The primary purpose of the study was to explore and conceptualise teaching practices of expert teacher educators. To this end, a phenomenological approach was used in order to understand the teaching practices of teacher educators in the way they understood and lived with (Tacconi, 2011). According to Marton (1988), phenomena stand for the meaning people attached to their experiences and Phenomenography tries to identify the different ways in which different people perceive, experience, conceptualised, and understand such experiences.

We tried to search critically for the concrete essence of the teacher educators' experience-based knowledge of teaching in the way it would enable us to recognize teaching practices which are commonly practiced by participants of the study (within and across universities), but also practices which are only expressed by some participants or by a single teacher educator. We tried to show loyalty to the phenomenon by consistently working to put participants' experiences in the way they perceived than approaching them from our personal understanding. We actively and repeatedly listened to descriptions of practices paying attention to ensure the development of categories based on the description provided by participants (Tacconi, 2011).

## **2.3. Procedures**

Phenomenology guided the attitudes of the researchers and the overall process of research including selection of the study participants, collection of data, analysis and reporting.

*Selection of participants.* 30 teacher educators, 15 from each university, were identified. These 30 participants were selected based on the premise that they could provide the range of experiences the study was interested in (Gonzalez, 2011). As a result, the sample of the study was narrow down to outstanding teacher educators who are recognized in positively influencing the preparation of teachers. We used different procedures, depending on the circumstances of each university, to identify outstanding teacher educators. We considered only teacher educators who satisfy two generic criteria: evidence for transforming learning of students and establishing positive relationship with students. Accordingly, combination of two or more of the following criteria was used in identifying outstanding teachers: higher achievers in consecutive teacher evaluations, experiences in handling teacher education courses, positive recommendation from heads, colleagues and previous students.

*Data collection.* In-depth and investigative interview was used in order to understand the deep and holistic descriptions of the lived experiences (Micari, Light, Calkins & Streitwieser, 2007). In addition, classroom observation was conducted at least once before interview in order to better understand the teaching practices of the respective interviewee (Marton, 1988). All interviews were conducted in medium of instruction being used by the teacher believing that it assists him/her to put clearly his/her practice in words. Each interview was transcribed verbatim as early as possible and then send back for confirmation by the storytellers. We also used this as an opportunity to raise additional queries on issues we found blurred. Each interview was finally translated in English.

*Analysis of data and construction of a theory.* Qualitative methods that go along phenomenological framework were carefully selected to analyse data. The study made use of a mix of Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2007; Tacconi, 2011). Grounded theory was used by the two coders for conceptualising inductively (*open coding*) the significant parts of experts' accounts from descriptive labels to formation of substantive categories and then core categories of teaching practices. *Axial coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to review the coding deductively from core categories down to subcategories, and to the source texts for the purpose of checking for appropriateness and representativeness of the categorization and conceptualisation made.

The process was facilitated by *Nvivo 10* software for qualitative data analysis that assisted us to visualize coding from core categories to the collection of sources that enabled us to continue with coding and recoding process up to the compilation of the report. We used *Nvivo 10* also to identify the recurrence of each substantive categories within as well as across cases and universities. This allowed us to identify the teaching practices which are common across cases, appear only in some cases or only in a case. Finally, the analysis of the experts' accounts ended into 13 core teaching practices having *contextualizing teaching* on the top of the list.

After the skeleton of all practices was sketched out using Grounded theory, network of stories from different sources in relation to specific practice was created (Clandinin, 2007). Presenting readers with network of stories signifies the validity of the categories conceptualised as readers get in touch with descriptions provided from the mouth of the horse (Tacconi, 2011).

### 3. Result and discussion

In this article we don't report all the 13 emerged themes (Hunde, 2015) but only the strategies emerged as a means by which teacher educators relate their teaching to the experiences, needs and life of student teachers.

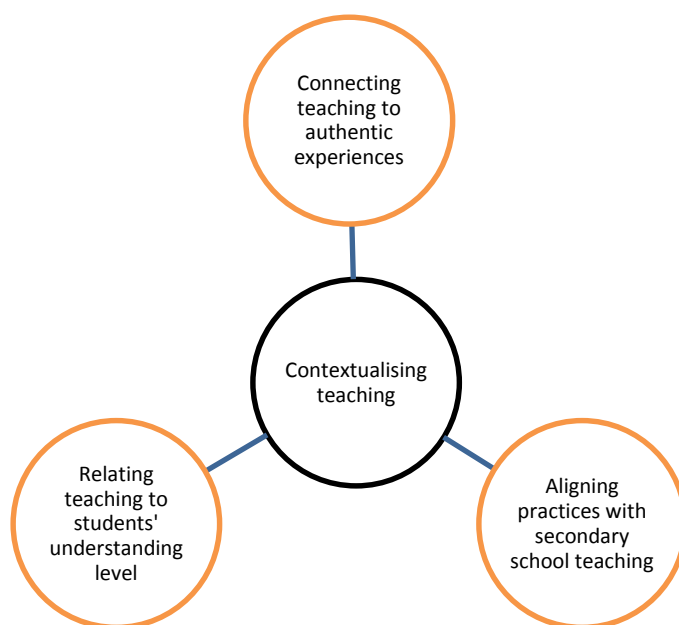


Figure 1. Strategies for contextualising teaching.

These strategies are: i) connecting teaching with authentic experiences; ii) aligning practices with secondary school teaching; iii) contextualising teaching to students' understanding level (Figure 1).

Accordingly, participants of the study witnessed the use of one or more of the three strategies in contextualising their teaching for the improvement of student teachers' learning. These strategies will be defined, elaborated and exemplified through narration in the sections to come.

### 3.1. Connecting teaching to authentic experience

Evidences emerged for the need of linking teaching activities to authentic experiences. Authenticity in this sense stands for any experience happening in the real world of work that students can easily perceive. In doing so, teacher educators can give meaning and life to contents he/she teaches in classroom. Therefore, this is the first way by which teacher educators can put their teaching in the context in which student teachers will use it.

Analysis of expert teachers educators narrations results in the following strategies:

- exemplifying teaching;
- applying privileged testimonies;
- making a lesson significant to the life of the learners.

*Exemplifying teaching.* One way of connecting teaching to authentic experiences is providing examples that students know and relate easily to what they are being learning. Experts can do this using examples from own classroom: “while I am teaching I give examples that students know and relate to their profession. For instance, if I am teaching classroom management: how to manage students in a class, I may give examples from my classroom practice. So, I may relate theory with practice and they can see easily the application” (PJ2/56)<sup>1</sup>.

In addition one other expert teacher educator spoke about the experiences of providing many examples from everyday life to make the lesson concrete: “I am often worried for the concreteness of my lesson. For that matter I give many examples from everyday life. I am trying to support my teaching of theory with concrete examples of what is happening at the time or what has happened very shortly” (PV7/12.4).

Participants who have had experiences of working in secondary school witnessed the benefit of bringing examples from secondary school contents. Bringing these contents makes learning more meaningful and usable in future. In support of this notion, Ertmer & Newby (1993) reveal that learning is facilitated when learners are able to use the concepts or skills learned as a tool in their subsequent learning. In addition, learning is a cumulative effect whereby current learning depends on the prior, then turn to be a base for the advanced one. This shows that proceeding to the high level of teaching at the moment students don't have clear understanding of the basic elements is just like constructing a huge building on a wrong basement.

To connecting teaching to authentic experiences experts also witnessed the use of lived examples that can facilitate the overall understanding of teaching efforts. This can be done

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<sup>1</sup> The symbols used at the end of texts represent in order: professor (P), Name of the university (J or V), code given to the corresponding professor (1...15), number after the slash (/) used to indicate the round of talk.

by bringing concrete cases from their own experiences of working as a secondary school teacher: “Having teaching experience of 11 years in a high school, I try to bring some examples and cases of good or bad teaching practices to class, focusing on what one may think as a challenge. Someone may see class as a collection of diversified students and as something which is very united and stand against them. We must create a climate of trust so that this antagonistic feeling that has always existed can be resolved and students who do not have great desire to work enforced to get engaged in work. I bring experiences that have happened to me or that I heard told by others as exemplar cases so as to assist learners understand how to manage classroom setting” (PV14/ 40).

The instructor is teaching by bringing issues he thinks challenging from his past experience as a school teacher. He believes that such experiences prepare well student teachers to tackle challenges they have to face when they are back to school for teaching. Moreover, other teacher educators with trainees who have had secondary school teaching experience have showed the possibility of bringing trainees’ experiences into teacher education classroom to make teaching concrete and meaningful. For that reason, they opted to invite students to present their experiences of teaching specific topic. Depending on the analysis of the offered cases, they shaped their lesson. This made the lesson, cases, exercises they used specific to the need of the target group. In this process, students come to understand the usefulness of the lesson for their work.

*Applying privileged testimonies.* Some teachers have also been using privileged testimonies in the attempt of connecting their teaching to realities happening outside of the class. Among this, one is inviting experts or people who have first-hand experience as a witness: “In my teaching, I like to bring witnesses. For example, for a few years I invited one deaf person, and a blind person that I have known for years. They shared their life experiences: difficulties, challenges, creativities and capacities for leading life. This is becoming an extraordinary evidence. They assist my students understand that the world of disability is not only that limited with the desperation and suffering with disease and pain, but it has also something to do with journey of happiness and success. Then I make these testimonies with a sort of challenge. Here is to make it clear that the inner posture with which we must approach to the persons with disabilities must always be in a faithfulness” (PV3/2.12).

As shown above, bringing privileged witnesses and direct testimonies has a great role in enabling learners to see the reality with different lenses. For example, inviting persons who have managed life successfully with disability to share their experiences assists learners to get understanding of disabilities not only from the view of the prevailing limitations but also as a potential of change within those people. It has a power to tell students what it means to be a teacher and how could they assist special needs students to cultivate their potential.

One expert went on witnessing the experience of using movies (documentary films and YouTube videos) in order to bring lived experiences to the classroom. Thus, with the help of videos, the teacher educator abled to present true stories from parents, teachers, experts and children with special needs. This approach save time, in addition to bringing some experiences that cannot be easily told in words.

*Making a lesson significant to learners’ life.* The other way participants found to ensure the authenticity of their teaching is by letting student teachers understand the significance of the lesson to their daily life. Learners can be more energised and engaged in learning at the moment they understand that what they are required to learn is related to their life in one or the other way. Extracts from two interviews illustrate this: “For me the biggest job of a teacher is to inspire students. You cannot control what is happening outside of the

class. But if you could inspire them, they may better engage in learning. Recently I encouraged them to read action research articles focusing on its application for solving school and personal problems they met. As a result, some students seem to be motivated and even asked for more related articles” (PJ6/19).

“I teach with something that affects an existential level. If students grab the importance of the lesson, for example what it means to know how to listen, they can aggressively engage themselves in learning. They can take initiative to dig out what it means active listening, how it can be done, and then they may exercises in their daily routine. Perhaps, such tendency is actually developed after thorough exercises, provocations, watching movies and the like. Thus, people eventually find this option interesting because it gives them the possibility to see possibilities” (PV1/4.10).

Learning can be initiated and sustained when students perceive the significance of the task which is supposed to be introduced by the teacher. In this regard, letting students understand the importance of learning task to their daily life, profession and future learning can definitely engage learners in a meaningful learning.

12 of the 30 expert teacher educators participating in the study directly talked about the strategy of contextualising teaching by connecting it to authentic experiences. Thus, manifestations in the two contexts make this practice common even though it seems more favoured by participants from VU. The difference can be seen when one looks at how teacher educators approached their lesson so as to tune it to authentic experiences. The glimpse of excerpts presented shows that while *exemplifying teaching* and *connecting teaching to the learner’s life* have been entertained in both contexts, using of *privileged testimonials* was reported only from VU. In sum, as shown by Figure 2, relatively more participants (9) from VU than from JU have witnessed the experiences of focusing on making their lesson authentic.

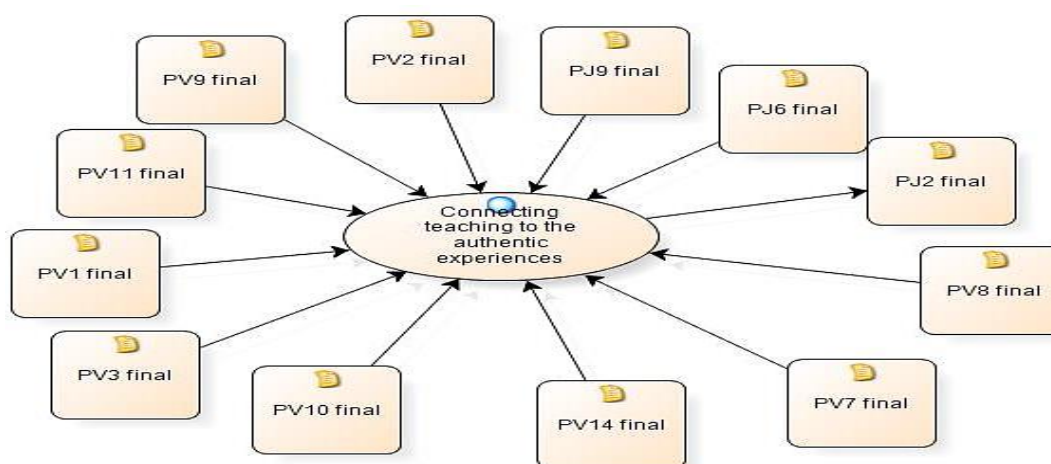


Figure 2. Practices of connecting teaching to authentic experiences.

### 3.2. Connecting teacher education practices to secondary school teaching

This category refers to actions experts exerted to fuse teaching practices tested in teacher education program with those of school experiences. This involves assisting trainees to learn teaching by doing what secondary school teachers are doing. It is obvious that aligning teacher education practices to what is happening in school settings has paramount

importance in preparing teachers who can easily handover the multitude and intertwined tasks of school teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Korthagen, Loughran & Russell, 2006).

Three strategies emerged from the analysis:

- exposing student teachers to secondary school contents;
- practicing the integration of contents and methods;
- practicing with the skills in the way they expected to be used in school.

*Exposing student teachers to secondary school contents.* Evidences show that teacher educators are trying to gear contents of their teaching to what trainees expect to do as school teachers. One way of doing this is carefully shaping teacher education content in the way it fits to school contents: “I have to choose content that I believe is essential in the teaching of history for those who teach at high school, because our program graduates are going to teach in classical high school which is very specific. So I have to select the contents I feel useful for them to know” (PV15.42).

The interview extract was taken from VU where teacher educators are given with indicators and course title so that they would determine the learning experiences to be provided. In that situation, primary intention of teachers is to look for the contents that are important to know how to teach at secondary school.

Coming to the case of JU, the contents of teacher education curriculum is predetermined, hence the task of teacher educators becomes shaping the practices in such a way that student teachers would get hands-on activities on the contents they are going to teach at secondary school. In doing so, they are purposefully leading student teachers to get experiences of using secondary school syllabus, teacher guide and student textbook. In this manner, learners become accustomed with the overview of contents of secondary school teaching: “There is syllabus and textbook for each grade level. There is a teacher guide that shows how to link the curriculum to the syllabus as well as student textbook. So, I believe that exercising with these all resources would help students to use all in harmony or compensate for the absence of any of them. I can say that they are getting exposure not only to the contents but also to the use of relevant materials like syllabus, teacher guide and textbook” (PJ15/43).

The quotation indicates the possibility of letting student teachers to get acquainted with curricular materials being used at secondary school. They intentionally direct trainees to deal with teacher education and school contents. Accordingly, trainees are enjoying the opportunity of exploring the contents they are going to teach at schools.

*Practicing the integration of contents and methods.* The above discussions show the attempt of teacher educators to determine contents to be learned in teacher education classroom from the point of practices required at secondary schools. However, evidences emerged in to this category go step ahead and show the possibility of using pedagogy that enable student teachers learn both contents and teaching methods at a time: “mathematics has themes like teaching arithmetic, teaching geometry, and teaching algebra and I teach them through project work. I divide students randomly into groups and assign them to one of these themes. Then, I ask what contents they think to be taught in secondary schools, its historical development, applications and teaching methods to be used. For example, the first group worked on teaching arithmetic. So, first they explained the historical background of arithmetic and then discussed how arithmetic was discovered during primitive period. They went on defining it mathematically. They identified the grades (9-12) where the content of arithmetic is focusing. This is followed by their explanation of

social, cultural value and other applications of arithmetic in daily life. At the end they were asked to decide and justify the methods appropriate to teach arithmetic (PJ3/26). The final project request for full of peer teaching where individual student will get opportunity to practice teaching using active learning” (PJ3/24.2).

The task of expert teacher educators go beyond merely exposing student teachers to secondary school contents. They focus on leading trainees to go deep into the historical development of the core contents of curriculum, understand the secondary school curriculum in its wholeness rather than treating compartmentalized contents, explore the application of the contents in the daily life, select and justify teaching approach and methods they believe could be used to teach the contents successfully. Besides improving trainees’ pedagogical content knowledge, this approach can assist them to improve the communication and the informed decision making skills as they are requested to present their work and challenged to justify each step and method used.

In sum, teaching of student teachers goes through a series of steps: assigning student teachers to the specific subject matter contents from secondary education; demanding them for elaboration, concretisation and conceptualisation of the targeted secondary school contents; making context informed selection of methods appropriate to the teaching of specific contents; demonstrating teaching of the contents using the method/s proposed.

*Practicing with the skills in the way they are used in school.* The other way of *connecting teacher education practices to secondary school teaching* is letting student teachers practice with skills in the way these skills can be used in secondary school teaching. For instance, during secondary and university general education, students from hard sciences use laboratory more or less to test theoretical concepts they have learned. Thus, the task of preparing lab activities, organizing, orienting, demonstrating and assisting is expected from teachers whereas the task of learners is to run the activities in the way it was prepared. Therefore, teaching about laboratory activities in teacher education class involves what a student teachers need to do as a teacher than running experiment in the way they used to do with as a student: “Student teachers have to prepare specific lab activities and teach their classmates assuming as if they were secondary school students. They are expected to demonstrate how to organize, lead and facilitate lab activities and learning. Therefore, by assuming their classmates as high school students, they have to do and show to students” (PJ5/24.3).

Trainees are supposed to model the behaviour of secondary school teachers in teaching targeting contents and lab activities. For instance, arranging laboratory set up, facilitating and evaluating lab activities in the way school teachers are supposed to do. In sum, allowing student teachers learn teaching practices through practices while in university facilitates the transition of student teacher from novice to expert, from being a student to being a teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2009).

Participants from both universities witnessed the experiences of aligning their teaching activities with teaching at schools. However, the practice is more evidenced in the narrations of teacher educators from JU. In general, eleven teacher educators witnessed relating their teaching to secondary school issues. Among these, seven of them were from JU while four belong to VU.

### **3.3. Contextualising teaching to the understanding level of students**

The analysis of teacher educators’ interviews reveals that *contextualisation of teaching* includes the taping up of new teaching on trainees’ prior knowledge. To this end, exploring

student teachers' understanding and shaping teaching in the way it fosters the understanding of the new phenomenon are practices expert educators reported as a successful way of preparing the would-be teachers. The following strategies emerged in this regard:

- understanding learners' background;
- shaping instruction to the level of student teachers.

*Understanding learners' background.* It is clear that in order to contextualize teaching, understanding the prior knowledge, mental set and aspiration of learners is a prerequisite task for teacher educators: "Knowing the quality or at least the kind of person whom I am to teach is worth the focus. Who are the participants, what are their peculiar situations and the like need immediate answer. Knowing what they need and what is useful to them is my priority. So, who they are, what they might know, and the experiences they have remained secret until they come to express themselves. So digging out such personal background is the first element in my teaching" (PV13/8).

Consequently, many experts participating in the study have narrated how they have been learning the situation of their students. The first and repeatedly indicated approach was letting student teachers introduce themselves. Devoting the first session or part of it for self-introduction by student teachers enable teacher educators to speculate the whereabouts of their student teachers.

*Shaping instruction to the level of student teachers.* Following understanding of trainees' background, teacher educators shape their teaching in the way it fits to the understanding level of learners. Of course, letting students introduce themselves on its own has enormous benefits as it paves ways for the establishment of sound relationship among students as well as between students and teacher educator. Trainees are more benefited when teacher educators are able to use such knowledge as an asset in planning and implementing teaching: "I checked the level of preparedness of trainees. I found out that they are not fairly homogeneous in terms of their preparation and teaching experiences because some of them come from the faculty of Law, the other from the faculty of Economics. Trainees coming from Law discipline didn't study much about economics. They are homogenous regarding school experiences because they have no or very short work experiences at school. Now, what I did in this course is recommending additional reading materials including different textbooks from secondary schools so that they can study independently as early as possible" (PV14/30.2).

The important lesson from this narration is the teacher educators' intention for understanding the characteristics of his learners and the action he took to bring all on board. Recommending learning materials including textbooks of secondary school for independent learning would allow learners to catch up with colleagues at their own time. Moreover, getting to know with student teachers as well as letting student teachers know each other will have paramount positive effect in the establishment of positive rapport among all.

The relevance of contextualising teaching to the understanding level of student teachers has been expressed by teacher educators from both universities (three from VU and two from JU). However, more witnesses regarding exploration of student teachers' background for the purpose of knowing who they are is coming from the side of VU. As already indicated, one of the way they could do this is through allowing student teachers to introduce themselves during the first lesson. The exploration of the prior knowledge of learners can be extended to exploring trainees' prior experiences in relation to specific

content or skill the teacher educators aspire to teach. Moreover, although the intensity is low, experts from both universities mentioned the experiences of shaping one's teaching according to the practical situation of student teachers as one of the good practices to be optimized.

#### 4. Conclusion

As the study is qualitative in nature, our intention was not to give a generalised conclusion about teaching practice of teacher educators. We rather tried to conceptualise teacher educators' experience-based teaching strategies commended for *contextualising teaching*. Contextualisation of teaching itself is conceptualised as putting one's teaching in the context whereby student teachers could easily understand issues to be taught and use them in their later learning and teaching as a teacher. The study is drawn on interviews of teacher educators from the Verona University and the Jimma University. An attempt was also made to compare qualitatively if there are variations or similarities across the two universities. However, the comparison was based only on what expert teacher educators narrated about their practices and it cannot be generalized to the whole population. Therefore, having these limitations in mind, we draw the following implications from the analysis of expert teacher educators' practices.

Three strategies were identified as possible means of contextualising one's teaching. *Connecting teaching to authentic experiences* appears to be demonstrated through exemplifying teaching with what is immediately available in the classroom, with experiences happening outside of the classroom, with metaphors or images, with teacher educators experience of teaching in secondary schools and practical experiences of student teachers at secondary schools. The second strategy was *aligning practices at teacher education and secondary school*. It can be done simply by bringing contents from secondary school and practice, either intentionally by the teacher educator or by student teachers who have experiences in secondary schools. The second means for the integration of content and method is involving student teachers in a prolonged project that demands them to investigate secondary school contents, devise teaching strategies, and demonstrate the how of teaching the content of secondary school. Moreover, the last identified tool is to ensure that student teachers shall learn and demonstrate important skills in the same way secondary school teachers are supposed to do. The third emerged strategy is named as *contextualizing teaching to the understanding level of student teachers*. Two specific practices emerged as a tool to this end. The first is getting to know who is who in the classroom. This is followed by shaping of one's teaching to the circumstances of student teachers.

Experiences of experts from both universities have contributed towards the conceptualisation of teaching practice as *contextualisation of teaching*. However, experts from each university have come up with unique and rich experiences in certain practices on which they can be exemplar to the other part. Participants from VU lead the JU counterpart in *connecting teaching to authentic experiences*. For example, using privileged testimonies, including resources person to classroom or bringing testimonial videos. On the contrary, experts from JU have contributed well for the development of *integration of methods and content*. They appear as a model in teaching student teachers how to teach secondary school students. In doing so, they lead student beyond deep exploration of the subject matter content to practicing with teaching a given content to secondary school students.

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