

## Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

### Teacher educators' conceptualization of ongoing language development in professional learning and teaching

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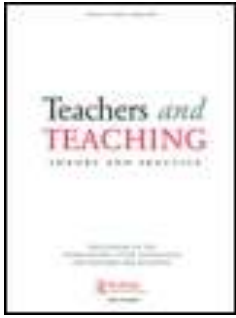


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## Teacher educators' personal practical knowledge of language

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### ABSTRACT

This paper describes teacher educators' understanding of language for classroom communication in higher education. We argue that teacher educators who are aware of their personal practical knowledge of language have a better understanding of their students' language use and provide better support for knowledge construction. Personal practical knowledge originates from teachers' professional practice and is based on their past experience, current awareness and future expectation. Data from focus group interviews with teacher educators ( $N = 35$ ) were used for content analysis. Findings demonstrate an emerging conceptualization resulting in two language modalities of personal practical knowledge, specified as: 'language-sensitive and interpersonally oriented' and 'language-focused and pedagogically oriented'. The insights contribute to building a professional practical knowledge base of language and communication-oriented teaching.

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### KEYWORDS

Classroom communication;  
language awareness; teacher  
professional development;  
teaching experience

## Introduction

This study concerns teacher educators' practical knowledge and awareness of language in their teaching and professional learning. This specific kind of awareness is still relatively unexplored and underdeveloped in educators' professional learning and does not play a substantive role in their subject-oriented classrooms. From this perspective, integrating language awareness in teacher educators' personal practical knowledge is relevant in order to interact with students about subject content.

Teachers and students in higher education are expected to have an elaborated level of language proficiency as they are involved in communication in academically and linguistically challenging educational settings (Smit & Dafouz, 2012). Generally, language is essential for teaching and learning at all levels (Cazden, 2001). Teacher educators' specific practical knowledge of their own language use adds an interdisciplinary and communicative expertise that is essential for the learning process and professional development of their students as future teachers.

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One of the key principles of socially situated conceptualizations of language is that language is the primary source for making meaning, and that language development is dependent on practical experience in social interaction (DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera, 2014). This practical experience, leading to forms of experiential knowledge (Barrett, 2007), was originally explained by Dewey (1938) who referred to reflection as a form of thinking that was inspired by disorder in directly experienced situations. In his view, experience led to knowledge that was constructed and reconstructed, personally and socially, through enduring and valued experiences in the past, present, and future (Craig, 2004, 2009; Golombek, 1998; Olson & Craig, 2005). Dewey's ideas about enduring experience determined for a large part educational research on experiential knowledge and was later developed through concepts such as practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1981, 1991) and personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985; Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Van Driel, Verloop, & De Vos, 1997). Personal practical knowledge has also been described as a way to reconsider past experience and future expectation, and to address the demands of a present situation (Connelly et al., 1997). As a result, teachers' personal knowledge, about themselves and their teaching, develops throughout their professional lives (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Tsang, 2004). Drawing on these concepts of personal practical knowledge and 'person-centered education' (Cornelius-White, 2007), professional development has been increasingly focused on learning from practical experience and interpersonal sensitivity (Knezic, Wubbels, Elbers, & Hajer, 2010). Against this background, teachers' practical knowledge has been argued to be the actual driving force behind teachers' thinking and behavior (Borg, 2001).

To date several studies have collected relevant data in order to investigate the comprehension and capacities of language use in a wide range of classroom settings (Schleppegrell & O'Hallaron, 2011). A recurrent observation in these studies appears to be that communication focused on (the transfer of subject) content is embedded in and facilitated by instructional and regulative registers (Christie, 1995, 2000), which set the conditions in which subject-specific learning can take place. Bailey and Heritage (2008) identified two varieties of informal and formal classroom communication: 'school navigational language' and 'curriculum content language' as in the communication of teachers with peers, and the communication of teachers during teaching. Drawing on Bailey and Heritage (2008), Scarcella (2008) added that notions of 'foundational knowledge of language' and 'essential academic language' are important for both the communication and transfer of knowledge. Recently, it has been argued that both registers of language are more complex than the above-implied distinction between formal language forms of 'content' and informal language forms of 'context' (DiCerbo et al., 2014), and that classroom communication for learning occurs in both registers (Dalton-Puffer & Nikula, 2006). Teacher educators are considered education specialists, both as an expert and as a role model, and can be expected to possess practical knowledge specifically concerned with the communication of subject-related concepts to prospective teachers (Love, 2009). This focus has placed new challenges on teacher educators in terms of their professional progress (Knezic et al., 2010). In this study, we define teacher educators' language as that which is used in classroom communication to teach, speak, and interact about their professional topics, which as a consequence feeds into both student-teachers' and teachers educators' own learning process. In this context, teacher educators' language is used to set up interactions that allow participants to reflect and build personal knowledge of each other and create collective meanings (Barton & Tusting,

2005). This specific knowledge of language for classroom communication draws on recent research (Bunch, 2013; Galguera, 2011; Love, 2009; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Schleppegrell & O'Hallaron, 2011) on the relationships between communication, content, and learning, including an understanding of spoken registers and disciplinary skills. We aimed at gaining insight into teacher educators' personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication, and at exploring ways in which this knowledge development could be stimulated and improved. Our research questions were:

How do teacher educators perceive their personal practical knowledge of language-oriented learning for classroom communication?

What preferences do teacher educators state for developing their personal practical knowledge of language-oriented learning for classroom communication?

## Method

### Context and participants

The current study was conducted with 35 teacher educators in 7 teacher training institutes of Universities of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands concerning the first phase of an educational program of professional development on language and communication. The practical knowledge of teachers, integrated with pedagogical and subject knowledge, is considered the personal theory of classroom practice (Bronkhorst, Meijer, Koster, Akkerman, & Vermunt, 2013; De Vries, Jansen, & van de Grift, 2013; Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014). Based on this definition, our sample of convenience was comprised of teacher educators ( $N = 35$ ) who expressed an interest in participating in a language-oriented professional development process to increase their personal practical knowledge of language in classroom practice. The type of sampling used was purposeful and non-probabilistic (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007): we selected seven higher education teacher training departments in Humanities (H), Sciences (S), and Social Studies (SS) to participate in the study with a minimum of two years of working experience (see Table 1). Participants were considered informants, i.e. sources of data, and not as representatives of the entire population of teacher educators. In cases of purposeful, non-probabilistic sampling, a sample of 35 is regarded adequate to reach conceptual saturation (Bronkhorst, Koster, Meijer, Woldman, & Vermunt, 2014; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

### Instruments

During focus group interviews participants were asked to respond to four sub-topics:

(1) 'Participants' recent and inspiring experiences with language in the classroom,' such as: 'What can you tell us about experience(s) with language you have had recently during

**Table 1.** Participants.

Team	Departments	Female	Male	Participants	Work experience group average/years
1	Sciences (S)	2	4	6	19
2	Sciences (S)	2	4	6	22
3	Humanities (H)	4	0	4	15
4	Humanities (H)	3	2	5	20
5	Humanities (H)	4	0	4	12
6	Social Sciences (SS)	1	5	6	23
7	Mixed (H,S, SS)	3	1	4	17
Total		19	16	35	18

class interaction that inspired you? and intended to open up the interviews. Based on these experiences, participants were asked about their levels, perceptions and preferences, (2)... 'level of personal language awareness,' such as: 'To what extent were you aware of your own language use during this experience?' (3) 'perceptions of meaning and relevance regarding personal practical knowledge of language,' such as: 'What meaning does language have in your example?'; and 'What is the relevance of this meaning to your practical knowledge of language?' and (4) 'preferences for development and improvement regarding this knowledge,' such as: 'How would you like to further develop your personal, practical knowledge of language?'; and 'What do you need to deepen and extend this knowledge of language?' Topics 1–3 were discussed in order to address the first research question ('perceptions about practical knowledge of language'). The last topic (4) was discussed to address the second research question ('preferences for development').

### **Procedure**

The researcher in this study acted as a moderator of the focus groups. The role of the moderator was to introduce the topics and focus the process in a neutral capacity (Reiskin, 1992). Direct involvement in this project served the purpose of required sensitivity to the topics and the need for methodological precision (Breakwell & Millward, 1995). Purpose, ground rules and topics regarding the interviews were explained to participants in writing prior to and at the beginning of the interviews. The ground rules addressed agreements of confidentiality, i.e. privacy in gathering and handling data (McLafferty, 2004; White & Thomson, 1995). All interviews began with an introduction of the central topic, including the working definitions. The central topics concerned 'teacher educators' personal Practical Knowledge of Language.' The first part of the topic, 'personal practical knowledge,' was explained as 'knowledge based on classroom practice as a result of past experience, present awareness and future expectation.' The second part, 'language,' was explained as 'the verbal use of language for classroom communication.' Participants were asked to speak individually and not to confuse or contradict each other. Each participant was asked to address all subjects and at the end of the discussion to select the key points for the summary. The nature of the questions posed by the moderator was open and questions clarified to encourage participants to speak and substantiate their statements. The questions differed slightly depending on the response of the individual groups. In other words, they were modified to suit the groups, in order to generate as much input as possible. Each group interview lasted 1.5 h.

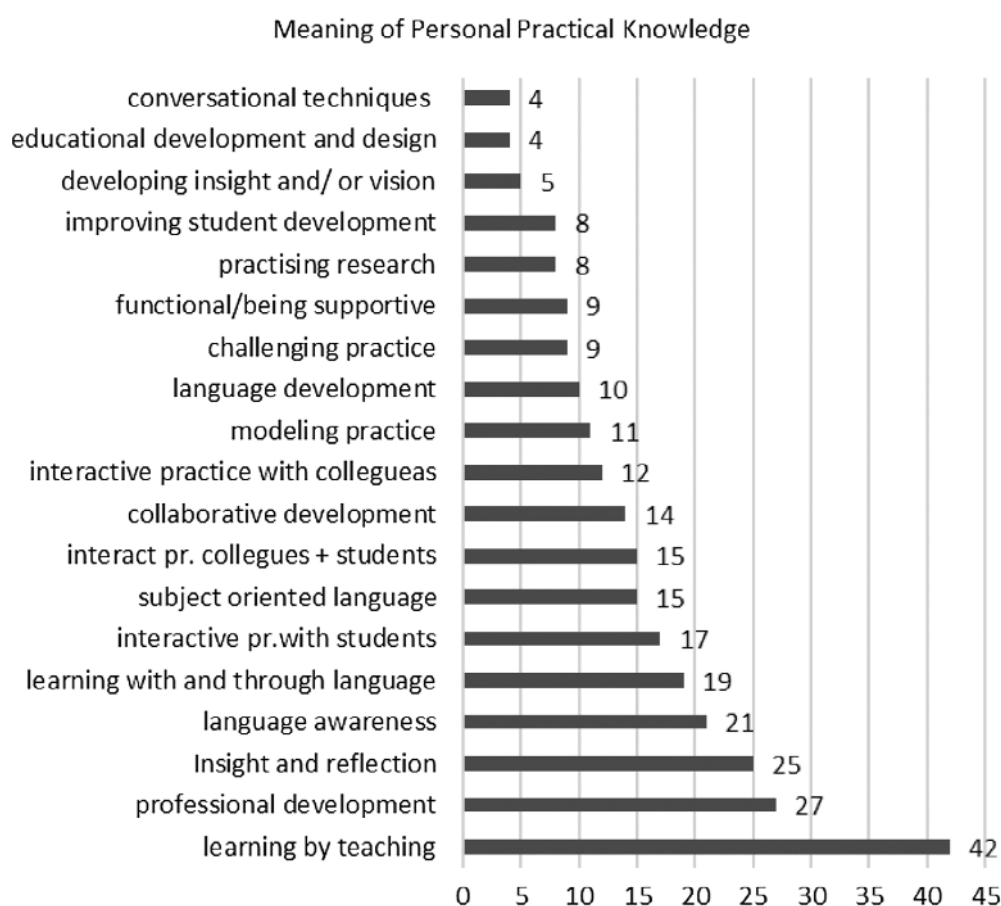
### **Analysis**

Focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data resulting from the focus group interviews were analyzed using Atlas ti. Content analysis was used to gain descriptive information. According to Cohen et al. (2007) 'content analysis' can be considered an alternative to the statistical approach of qualitative data and be used to obtain numerical data from word-based data, to open the possibility to describe the relative occurrence and significance of certain topics (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We applied content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify participants' understanding, i.e. meaning and relevance, of their Practical Knowledge of Language and their preferences for improvement. This was performed by a systematic comparison of the categories and using participants' perceptions as a frame of reference (Boeije, 2002). The final summation of data allowed us to identify the main categories for analysis (Atkinson &

Hammersley, 1994) (Figures 1–3). From each category a top four (of personal practical knowledge of language) was established (Tables 1–7). The first author identified all steps of data gathering and analysis. One of the co-authors conducted a formative audit at the beginning of code allocation, in which all codes were checked and discussed until agreement was found. After finishing all code allocation, the process was repeated by a third and independent researcher. In order to ensure the validity, transferability and relevance of all steps, respondent validation, reflexivity and attention to negative cases were evaluated and an audit trail was kept to monitor the process (Cohen et al., 2007).

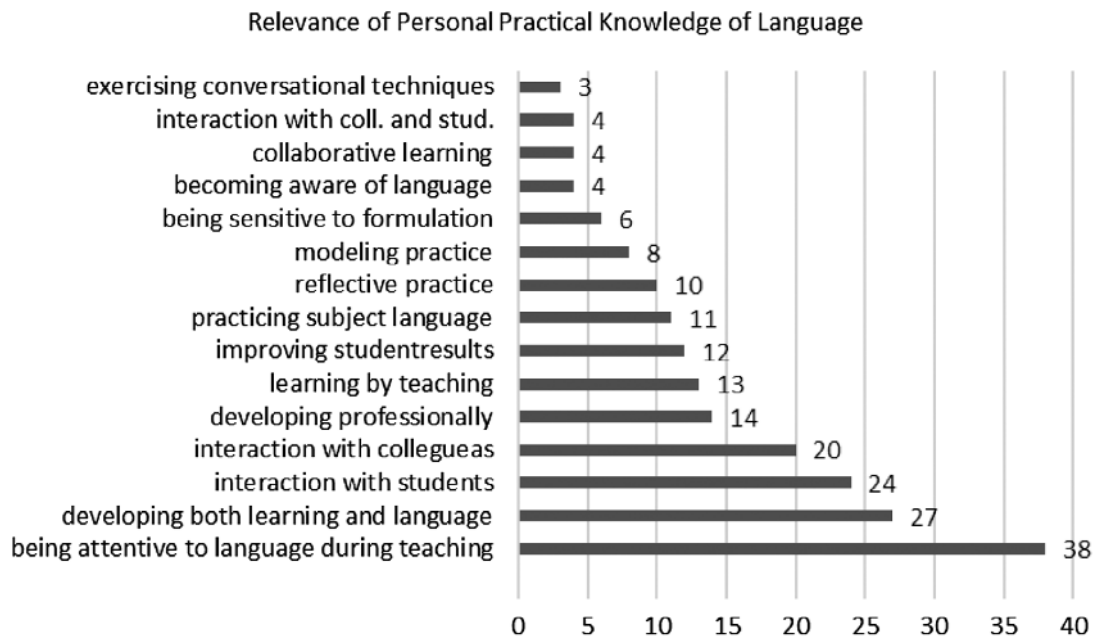
## Results

Based on the results of the topics of ‘personal experience’ (1) ‘awareness’ (2) and connected ‘meaning and relevance’ (3) we addressed the first research question: ‘perceptions of personal practical knowledge of language-oriented learning.’ The results were converted into an outline of ‘meaning’ (Figure 1, Tables 2 and 3) and an outline of ‘relevance’ (Figure 2, Tables 4 and 5). The results of the last topic ‘development and improvement’ (4) were used to address the second research question; ‘preferences for improving personal practical knowledge of language’ (Figure 3, Tables 6–8).

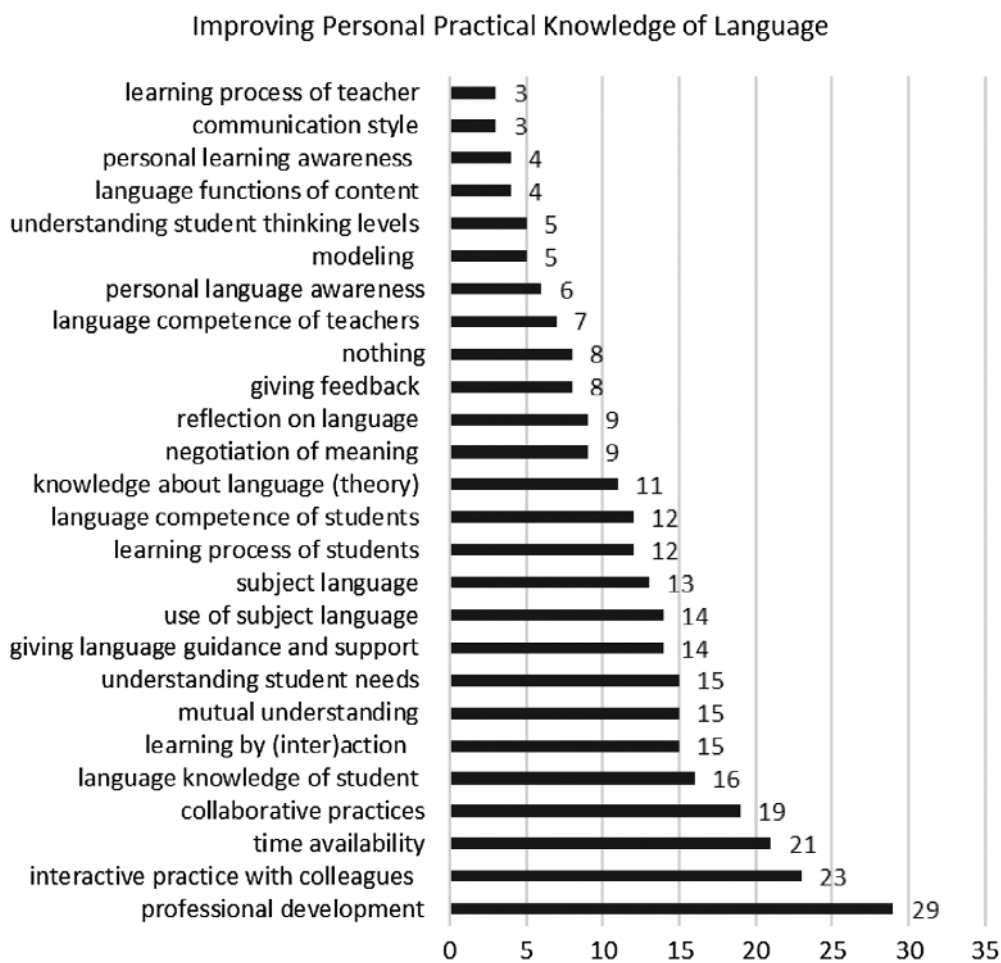


**Figure 1.** Meaning of personal practical knowledge of language, outline.





**Figure 2.** Relevance of personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication, outline.



**Figure 3.** Improving personal practical knowledge of language, an overview.

**Table 2.** Meaning of personal practical knowledge of language, four key categories.

Key categories	Perceptions
1 Teaching	Developing teacher knowledge and skills by doing and experience during teaching practice
2 Professional development	Forms of formal and informal professional development activities in the workplace
3 Insight and reflection	Reflecting on the job in retrospect and developing insights as a result
4 Awareness	Developing language awareness during and after class

**Table 3.** Meaning of personal practical knowledge of language, individual frequencies of the focus groups.

Meaning of personal practical knowledge of language MPKL								
	P1: S	P2: S	P3: SS	P4: H	P5: H	P6: H	P7: MX	Total
1. MPKLt*	6	4	4	8	5	10	5	42
2. MPKLpr	6	3	3	4	2	6	3	27
3. MPKLir	2	3	4	5	3	5	3	25
4. MPKLaw	2	2	3	4	5	3	2	21
Totals	16	12	14	21	15	24	13	115

\*Meaning of personal practical knowledge of language: teaching (1. MPKLt); professional development (2. MPKLpr); insight and reflection (3. MPKLir); awareness (4. MPKLaw).

**Table 4.** Relevance of personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication, key categories.

Key categories	Perceptions
1 being attentive to language during teaching	Concentrating on language-oriented teaching
2 language development being part of learning development and vice versa	Interacting between content knowledge of language and language knowledge of content
3 interactive practice with students	Understanding language-oriented student learning
4 interactive practice with colleagues	Understanding language-oriented and conceptual teacher (learning?)

**Table 5.** Relevance of personal practical knowledge of language for individual groups, individual frequencies.

Relevance of personal practical knowledge of language RPKL								
	P1: S	P2: S	P3: SS	P4: H	P5: H	P6: H	P7: MX	TOTALS:
1. MPKLal*	8	5	8	5	2	6	4	38
2. MPKLladled	5	6	3	4	1	3	5	27
3. MPKLips	5	3	5	3	4	1	3	24
4. MPKLipc	2	2	3	4	3	2	4	20
Totals	20	16	18	16	12	10	17	109

\*Relevance of Personal Practical Knowledge of Language RPKL: being attentive to language during teaching (1. MPKLal); language development being part of learning development and vice versa (2. MPKLladled); interactive practice with students (3. MPKLips); interactive practice with colleagues (4. MPKLipc).

### **Meaning of personal practical knowledge of language**

Based on the summary of data from the focus groups, assigned to the 'meaning' of practical knowledge, we specified 22 categories (Figure 1). A top four (Table 2:1–4) was compiled of the most often indicated (key) concepts during the focus interviews. The corresponding underlying frequencies (Table 3) provided insight into the main concepts and the relationships between these concepts and the different groups as discussed in the group interviews.

Participants explained ‘meaning’ as: ‘undergoing the experience of teaching’ and ‘being a teacher’ (Table 2:1). This knowledge was, according to participants, based on practical experience with either ‘student improvement,’ ‘student-related involvement,’ or a combination of the two.

I am particularly concerned with the development of students. In recent years I have become more aware of the added possibility that teachers can also learn from this experience. (Teacher 3, Team 2)

Participants further identified this knowledge to be a ‘method of professional development’ (Table 2:2), followed by ‘insight and reflection’ (Table 2:3) through contemplation on the job and emerging insights, and developing ‘language awareness’ as a result, (Table 2:4) during and after classroom practice. Overall, the total number of indications was relatively consistent over all focus groups, with an average of 16.4: Humanities (H) 21, 24, and 15; Sciences (S) 16 and 12; Social Sciences (SS) 14; Mixed (Mx) 13 (Table 3).

### ***Relevance of personal practical knowledge of language***

Based on the summary of data from the focus groups assigned to the ‘relevance’ of practical knowledge, 15 categories were formulated (Figure 2) providing an overview of the indicated importance of personal practical knowledge of language. A top four (Table 4:1–4) was compiled of the most relevant and often indicated key concepts. The corresponding underlying frequencies (Table 5) provided insight into the main concepts and the relationships between these concepts and the different groups.

The relevance of personal practical knowledge of language was attributed to the attitude of teachers during practice: ‘being attentive to language while teaching’ (Table 4:1), resulting in a cycle of learning: ‘by language development based on learning development’ and vice versa (Table 4:2).

I’ve seen it going wrong very often, even in higher education, because, for example, when a long and boring explanation was given on features of terminology, students fell asleep and thus it yielded little personal knowledge of language. But anything you would try to teach people this way, would fail. So this is not unique to my knowledge of language. What is unique is that you teach and, by paying attention to language, develop language competence in order to provide students with a view of content-related language (Teacher 3/Team 7)

In this view, content and language were considered inseparable in teacher pedagogy (Table 4:2). Relevance was also attributed to certain practices of teachers, such as ‘interactive practice with students’ (Table 4:3) and ‘interactive practice with colleagues’ (Table 4:4) specifically when involved with forms of reflective practice, such as investigative pedagogy, collegial consultation and professional check-ups. Overall, participants’ past experiences emerged as the primary focus and means to understand the meaning and relevance of personal practical knowledge. The underlying frequencies for the four key categories (Table 5) were relatively consistent in the individual department groups with an average of 15.5: Humanities (H): 10, 16, and 13; Sciences (S): 20 and 16; Social Sciences (SS): 18; and Mixed (MX): 17. Because of this inequality in individual frequencies, potential qualitative differences were not transparent (Table 5).

With regard to participants’ awareness of language during teaching practice, 28 participants (80%) responded (with their impressions?) about their present extent of self-perceived language awareness (Table 2:4; Table 3:1) when the topic was raised. Most participants

recognized the importance of awareness regarding practical knowledge of language but only a few were aware of the effects thereof during teaching practice.

Trying to create more language awareness; there is still a lot that is unknown among teachers, [and] too little thinking about the role language plays in whether or not the teacher will be able to obtain results, or being able to convey your message and the core of what you want to get across. (Teacher 5/ Team 1)

I am not always so aware of my non-verbal communication, for example, that I talk too loud or with hidden intent in my message; then students get dissatisfied with my verbal feedback. (Teacher 4/ Team 2)

From this group of 28 participants, 64% indicated forms of unawareness of their practical knowledge of language, and 36% indicated forms of awareness in various degrees. In the former, forms of greater 'unawareness,' participants questioned either the need to know about their personal practical knowledge: 'It seems to me the question is whether this is desirable. I think that if I became aware of my personal practical knowledge of language during my teaching, it would be counterproductive,' or expressed little or no awareness of their personal practical knowledge: 'I never take into account whether I am aware or not of my own language learning,' 'Maybe I am even more unaware than I thought I was.'

Those who indicated forms of greater 'awareness' expressed either the will to know about their personal practical knowledge: 'I'm always learning language while I am teaching, or else I would not be a good teacher. I also tell this to my students,' or showed forms of increasing awareness:

I was not so aware of parts of my own personal practical knowledge of language when I had to think about theory. I sometimes repeated things three times in one sentence. I see that I still do this, but I am more aware of it. It is a process.

Other participants indicated awareness without a preconceived plan: 'I am probably aware of my language but I do not think about it,' and 'I think that I learn of my language by interacting with colleagues about how they are in the classroom by talking and developing ideas or sharing new techniques of teaching practice.'

From the contributions of this group (of greater awareness), 'language sensitive' and 'language focused' practical knowledge were identified. Language sensitive was related to forms of being and attitude, such as *preparedness, language awareness, and attentiveness*, within a predominant receiver-focused mode, e.g. *listening, thinking, reflecting*. Language focused referred to forms of activity, such as *talking, instructing, explaining, structuring, referring, feedback* and *student checks, directing, regulating, guiding, and pointing*, within a mostly sender-focused mode, e.g. forms of direct and strategic instruction (Table 6). Noticeable in this context was the relatively limited focus on a combined sender and receiver-focused mode, such as interactive practice and related listening skills, e.g. *investigative questioning, reflecting, mirroring, paraphrasing, summarizing*.

### **Improving personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication**

Based on the summary of data from the last topic assigned, 'improving' practical knowledge of the teacher educator, 26 categories were formulated (Figure 3) to provide an overview of indicated means to develop and improve personal practical knowledge of language. From the 26 categories, a top four was compiled (Table 7:1-4) of the most often indicated

**Table 6.** Examples of two language modalities: language-sensitive and language-focused oriented learning.

Language-sensitive and interpersonally oriented <i>related to forms of teachers' attitude within a predominant receiver-focused mode</i>	Language-focused and pedagogically oriented <i>related to forms of teachers' activity; within a predominant sender-focused mode</i>
Subject-oriented teacher educators are usually not very concerned with language, but tend to focus solely on their knowledge of the subject. Although knowledge transmission can only take place in class if a relationship is established. I believe that this side of <i>understanding language</i> is still underexposed (Teacher 1, team 2)	I do not only see this in terms of phraseology but rather as an entire <i>teaching approach</i> , so for instance how you are <i>explaining terms and synonyms while teaching</i> . Students said, hey, I've never really understood this, but now we'll manage, and I think that is <i>language motivated pedagogy</i> , so in that sense I think it can make a big difference (Teacher 1, team 7)
Always <i>reflecting on what I say</i> during instruction, <i>do I understand, do you understand</i> , is it clear? (Teacher 2, team 3)	By <i>teaching and explaining the same thing over again in different words</i> (Teacher 5, team 1)
By <i>listening carefully to responses</i> during my instruction, what is said and how, I can adapt myself and create conditions to improve my practice (Teacher 6, team 2)	Developing theoretical depth as well as transformation into the classroom by becoming more of an expert in <i>transmitting content knowledge</i> (Teacher 2, team 3).
In order to communicate something, your <i>attitude</i> is very important and how you <i>pay attention to language forms and manners</i> , I think we are only at the beginning of that piece (Teacher 3, team 6)	By <i>instructing</i> how to deal with language competence at all levels as a means to advance student learning of subject matter (Teacher 5, team 2)
When students recognize their own struggle with language, it can make a tremendous appeal on your own experiences with the matter. Recognizing and <i>understanding the same struggles with language</i> are important tools to collect ways of <i>language-aware learning</i> (Teacher 3, team 5)	By <i>teaching</i> students, during class, to express themselves better and to <i>direct them how to use language to further develop both their ideas and communication</i> (Teacher 2, team 6)

**Table 7.** Improving personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication, key categories.

Key categories	Preferences
1 Language-oriented training and development	Developing teacher knowledge and skills through a combination of formal and informal learning
2 Interactive practices with colleagues	Developing communication skills through interactive practice via inter-vision, self-reflection and peer feedback
3 More time	Developing professional development on a structural basis into the curriculum
4 Working together	Developing and designing collaborative practice and skills

key concepts. Corresponding subcategories: key incentives and key objectives were listed separately (Tables 8 and 9).

Preferences for improvement appeared to be based on future expectation and were focused on 'language-oriented training and development' (Table 7:1). When expressing a preference for more time (Table 7:3) for future 'professional development,' participants also expressed a need for 'interactive practices with colleagues' (Table 7:2) to generate inspiration and motivation for 'making more time' and invest in 'collaborative practice with colleagues' (Table 7:4). In this context, a number of specific areas for language-oriented training and professional development was reported: (i) 'developing ways to transfer new techniques and instructional techniques in teaching practice'; (ii) 'developing ways for interactive practice during verbal instruction'; (iii) 'developing ways for collaborative practice with students'; (iv) 'developing knowledge of meta-language'; and (v) 'developing knowledge of subject-based literacy.' Objectives for improving personal practical knowledge of language for classroom

**Table 8.** Key incentives for improvement of personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication.

Key incentives
1 Integrating methods for effective language pedagogy
2 Integrating teacher educators' language competence and communicative pedagogy
3 Increasing teacher educators' language guidance
4 Increasing teacher educators' understanding of students

**Table 9.** Key objectives for improvement of personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication.

Key objectives
1 Developing understanding of teacher educators' language competence
2 Developing comprehension of students' knowledge of learning and communication
3 Developing comprehension of students' competency of learning and communication
4 Developing comprehension of developing mutual understanding between teacher educator and students

communication (Table 8:1–4) were considered to be of interest for 'developing understanding of teacher educators' language competence' (Table 8:1) followed by 'student learning and improvement' (Table 8:2–4). Addressing this student-focused orientation, participants differentiated between 'mastering' and 'applying' language-oriented learning in order to improve both students' reasoning and communication skills.

Ultimately, we want students to learn how to reason in a professional way. The way in which we practice interaction, as teacher trainers, should contribute to this. Teachers themselves must develop the awareness that language is very important for the learning of their pupils so they pay more attention to their own language as well as that of their pupils. (Teacher 1, Team 6)

Students should be taught the discourse of the teaching profession [to] make them [an] apprentice to our discourse. This requires that teachers talk in different ways about the same subject, and they can help students to express themselves better in relation to their subject. Therefore, you also have to give a lot of feedback, not only on what they say but also how they say it. (Teacher 3, Team 1)

Potential incentives for improving personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication (Table 8:1–4) were: 'integrating methods for effective language pedagogy' (Table 8:1), followed by 'improving language competence and communicative pedagogy' (Table 8:2) (i.e. learning to listen, learning how to interpret what students say), and 'improving language guidance' (Table 8:3) (i.e. learning to supervise students in the field of language and learning skills), and by doing so 'increasing teacher educators' 'understanding of students' (Table 8:4) as a result. Overall, participants indicated a need for developing 'language focused pedagogy' in which language competence and communicative pedagogy were integrated (Table 9:1; Table 8: 1,2). This was accompanied by the need for the development of a 'language sensitivity' in order to foster mutual understanding between teachers and students (Table 9:4; Table 8:4). Based on the combination of these two modalities, participants expected to develop an understanding of students' competency of communication and knowledge construction (Table 9:2,3). Our findings demonstrated a preference for a combined approach of these two related modalities of language.

## Discussion and conclusion

Based on the available literature we argued that student learning in classroom interaction depends on the quality of teacher educators' use of language, and the awareness of their personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication. In terms of concrete and practical activities and ways to develop this, however, evidence appeared to be scarce. We set out to explore the topics by interviewing teacher educators in order to obtain concrete indications of their understanding and motivation to improve personal practical knowledge. We examined their views through the following central question: 'How do teacher educators perceive their personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication, and what preferences do they have for developing their personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication?' Based on our findings, we identified a primary focus and understanding of personal practical knowledge of language based on past experiences and less on 'current awareness' and 'future anticipation,' as will be discussed below. We also found an emergent conceptualization of the practical knowledge of language for classroom communication; i.e. variations in degrees of language awareness and language attitudes, leading us toward two related language modalities: 'language-sensitive and interpersonally oriented' and 'language-focused and pedagogically oriented' practical knowledge of teacher educators. We will discuss these approaches below with specific consideration of the research questions.

### ***How do teacher educators perceive their personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication?***

Participants characterized their awareness of 'personal practical knowledge of language' during classroom communication in a variety of ways. This outcome corresponded to research on professional development and 'meaning-oriented learning' of experienced teacher educators, defined as 'deliberate teaching to enhance learning of the expert teacher educator'; and as a result learning to teach by developing an informed, personal theory of practice (Bronkhorst et al., 2013). Teachers' practical knowledge of language was considered to be most relevant to participants' comprehension of language competence in general and students' learning more specifically. Notable was participants' predominant attention to student learning and knowledge, when talking about the importance of classroom communication for teacher educators' personal practical knowledge. Nonetheless, when addressing classroom communication related to student learning, an interesting distinction was made between 'mastering language' to improve students' reasoning and the 'application of language' to improve teacher-student communication. Although this was related to student learning, our findings suggest a language-oriented knowledge base for teacher educators in which two key aspects (reasoning and communication) are combined. This is a similar concept to 'academic interaction' and 'interpersonal language' previously described by Schleppegrell (2004) and Cummins (2008). In terms of pedagogical skill for teaching in teacher education, these outcomes appear in line with previous results of effective practices for support and scaffolding techniques and the use of teacher talk, as an instrument for improving reasoning and understanding (Aalto & Tarnanen, 2015; Cummins, 2008; Lee, Quinn, & Valdés, 2013). Primary focus and understanding of personal practical knowledge appeared to be particularly based on past experience. (Our findings demonstrate personal

knowledge of language to be relatively distinctive and available when based on past experience but less so when related to present awareness and future intention. This finding is in accordance with results from previous research (Tsang, 2004) in which teachers indicated difficulties in anticipating decisions due to limited access to their personal practical knowledge during classroom teaching. Starting from ‘personal practical knowledge’ as a way of reconsidering past experience and future goals in order to deal with the demands of a present situation (Connelly et al., 1997), we further identified personal practical knowledge to be both personal and collective. This outcome indicates a sequential development in which collective knowledge emerged from shared personal knowledge. Our findings are a continuation of previous studies in the context of sociocultural approaches to learning such as ‘common construction of knowledge’ (Mercer, 1995) and, more recently, ‘common concept formation’ (Knezic et al., 2010). Our study emphasized the collective aspect as a form of communication in which participants made a conscious group effort to learn with and from each other in order to deepen both their personal and mutual understanding. Our findings add to the previous research of Christie (2000), Bunch (2006) and Bailey and Heritage (2008) by merging two previously considered, independently functioning registers (instructional and regulative) into a new language modality combining personal and collective practical knowledge.

### ***What preferences do teacher educators have for developing their personal practical knowledge of language for classroom communication?***

With respect to preferences for improvement, participants indicated a preference for evaluative and reflective forms of interaction with peers. This practice was considered an occasional work form rather than a means through which language-oriented practical knowledge was conceived in an integrated and systematic manner. This outcome was interesting in that it exposed participants’ partial engagement within a context of relative unawareness of their own language use. According to Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, and López Torres (2003), reflective practice is only possible when based on one’s awareness of self (as a teacher) which is achieved through self-examination built on personal experience and understanding. The combined results of relatively low language awareness among the majority of participants and a preference for reflective practice with colleagues, appeared to indicate a need to strengthen their professional identity. Following Connelly et al. definition (1997) and in continuation of Tsang (2004), our results substantiated the relevance of personal practical knowledge of language as it relates to classroom communication, and the anticipation of future classroom situations and interventions.

In summary, the concept of practical knowledge provided a unified perspective on how understand personal practical knowledge for classroom communication. Our results indicate that classroom communication in general is not fully integrated into teacher educators’ practical knowledge. Teacher educators’ professional language development should therefore focus on promoting practical knowledge of language both personally and collectively, including cognitive, social, and interpersonal aspects. Our results support an approach that is both interpersonal and pedagogical, aimed at a more detailed level in order to reduce the gap between theoretical and practical implications of language for classroom discourse. We conclude that, in order to improve the concurrent development of both teacher educators’ and student-teachers’ knowledge construction and their language usage during classroom



communication, it is essential to understand teachers' personal practical knowledge of their 'language-sensitive and interpersonal,' and 'language-focused and pedagogical' aptitudes.

### ***Limitations and implications for further research***

With reference to the limitations, we note a few procedural and methodological issues that are relevant for future research. Regarding the procedural issues, there were two matters.

First, using focus groups as a research method implies that the researcher met the participants personally. This may raise questions concerning the ethical accountability and the potential influence that the researcher had on the data collected. Much research has been done to the role of the researcher in conducting qualitative research (Chavez, 2008; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Patton, 2002). In our study, we learned that the involvement of the researcher in this setting was about intending to balance between 'understanding the setting as an insider' and 'describing it to and for outsiders' (Patton, 2002, p. 268) and thus to question the extent to which our personal involvement and beliefs may have affected the findings and interpretations. The ongoing and recurring discussions between the researchers inspired further critical thinking and increased our understanding of the qualitative research as also to be a process of self-reflection.

Second, to be a moderator and researcher at the same time was experienced to be challenging because of the necessity to possess interpersonal and active listening skills and be neutral and non-judgmental at the same time. With years of experience as a teacher of communication in higher education, it was possible to deploy this expertise to promote participants' trust in both the moderator and researcher roles, as well as to increase the possibility of an open and interactive dialog with the different teacher groups.

With regard to the methodological issues, we cannot be sure if teachers' perceptions were always in accordance with their practices. Perceptions and practices have multifaceted relationships and are not always consistent (Boulton-Lewis, Smith, McCrindle, Burnett, & Campbell, 2001; Calderhead, 1996; Fang, 1996). Secondly, as a result of this, the analysis in the current study was effective to delineate the understanding of the sample but did not reveal enough to also formulate individual teacher targets and tools, as a consequence of treating the data from a more quantitative analytical framework. In order to understand these issues more thoroughly in the larger professional lives and learning of the teacher educators, qualitative detail analysis should be an important part of follow-up research in order to, for example, illustrate how shared knowledge appears and can be applied in teaching practice.

Based on this research, we have elaborated the recommendation to advance the disclosure and development of teacher educators' practical knowledge of language at both individual and collective levels. We also advise an interventional approach consisting of individual class visits and group dialogs. Such an approach may stimulate teacher educators to share their pedagogical and interpersonally oriented language (as developed in teaching practice) with colleagues. In current study, we assessed teacher educators' practical knowledge by means of what they reported in groups. To gain more insight into the collective practical knowledge, using more data sources such as classroom observations and reflective writings is recommended in order to increase our understanding of this extension of practical knowledge. It would be interesting to study how practical knowledge of language and the actual teaching action are related, both on a personal and a collective basis. Following up on

indicated preferences for improvement through reflective interaction with peers, building upon shared practical knowledge calls for a method in which participants make a deliberate effort to learn with and from each other. The conceptual framework for a practical knowledge base of language for teacher educators, along with the potential for improvement through the advancement of shared practical knowledge, sets the stage for future research.

### Disclosure statement

The researchers have neither financial interest nor benefits from direct applications of this research.

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