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An inquiry into the constructed meanings attributed to the notion of 'excellence' in a
VET college professionalisation programme

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By

Sander de Kock BA, MA

(BA Fontys University of Applied Sciences)

(MA Roehampton University)

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Abstract

The thesis aims to investigate the meanings given to the notion Excellence as used in the name “de Excellente Docent” (The Excellent Teacher) given to a professionalisation programme in a VET college.

Based on the understanding that meaning is constructed in social situations where language is used, data were gathered from social situations belonging to the professionalisation programme. Five different social situations were identified and labelled as units. This resulted in a data corpus consisting of more than 80 documents that together captured the professionalisation programme’s discourse across the five units.

A discourse analytical approach was used in a total of six separate analysing rounds or iterations in order to sort, filter and examine the data corpus. The first three analysing rounds utilised content analytical tools to generate a manageable amount of data from across the five units. Subsequently, informed by the analytic tools of James Paul Gee (2014), the last three analysing rounds focused on obtaining an in-depth perspective upon the discourse that remained in the data corpus. Applying both approaches facilitated finding meanings given to the word ‘excellence’ at the surface and also at a deeper level. Gee’s manner of conducting discourse analysis provides the researcher with the possibility of understanding the use of the notion excellence across different occasions and by different agents.

In the end the surface meaning of excellence as used to denote ‘the excellent teacher’ is about the extent to which an individual teacher is an investigative, entrepreneurial and inspiring educational professional. The notion acts as a slider on a scale to indicate to what degree a teacher participating in the programme is excellent. Hence it provides a qualitative meaning to the notion. At a deeper level, the focus is less upon the individual and more on the meaning given to excellence in keeping with neo-liberalistic assumptions about education that relate to an organisation’s interests. This provides the notion excellence with a more economic meaning. In the discourse there are links to the striving for continuous improvement of the educational practice and a focus on how individual professional development can add value to an educational team, school and in the end the overlying organisation. Both continuous improving and the adding of value can be seen as concepts belonging to the neo-liberalistic culture. It is through looking at a deeper level at the discourse that this insight was revealed.

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Acknowledgements

In March 2007 I remember saying never to start another postgraduate programme again. I was just awarded my MA. Seven years later in I started at the University of Hull with my EdD. Now five years on from that start in the then Graduate School with a pillar in the middle of the room that later became significant in the programme when we learned about researcher positionality, I close another postgraduate programme.

That I have not kept my word is due to Peggy, my loving wife who has, as always, been my greatest support during my travels into the world of academia. During this trip I have not only gained a better understanding of the world of academia but also found out where to position myself in a professional capacity and made new friends along the way.

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1 Introduction

To be called an excellent teacher in a vocational education and training (VET) college in the Netherlands is not an everyday occurrence. Nevertheless, it occurs more and more these days. This becomes apparent when different governmental policies related to excellence in education (Buwalda-Groeneweg and Hooge, 2015; Hegarty, 2006; Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2012; Onderwijsraad, 2011a) are examined.

Dutch governmental policies show that the notion of excellence is used in relation to both student programs and professionalisation programs for continuous development of teachers (Ministerie van Algemene, 2007; Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2011; C. en W. Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2011a; Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2012). According to a wider range of scholars such as Ball (2016a,b.) Ball et al. (2011) Biesta (2017, 2015) and Buwalda-Groeneweg and Hooge (2015) governmental policies are used to steer what happens in schools. The VET college in which I work is no exception.

This VET college is situated in the south of the Netherlands. As a VET college it is part of the Dutch educational system. It provides secondary vocational and vocational education and training at level 1 to 4 for pupils and students in the age of 12 to 20. The VET college serves a local and regional urban system in which 2 other VET colleges provide education as well. Some courses can be followed in either of these colleges. A total of 11,000 students get their vocational education and another 1700 their secondary vocational education in the VET college that is the context of this research project. Over the last four years, an average of around 1000 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) worked for the VET college in the research project. This results in an average of 1300 individual employees providing education for almost 13,000 students.

One of the implementations related to excellence is aimed at students; the other can be found in a two year institutional professionalisation program for continuous development of teachers ("Excellente docent - InSite AFAS template 2016," n.d.). In this research project the focus is on the professionalisation program for continuous development of teachers. This is because my main interest is related to the continuous professionalisation of teachers. Secondly the student orientated environment in relation to excellence has been the focus of a pilot study in order to try out a methodological approach and therefore cannot be used for the main research project.

Teachers participating in the two year program mentioned above develop themselves through reflective practice in relation to being a practitioner. Furthermore they study the field of their

own subject or expertise. Finally the teachers work on their research skills related to improving or understanding their own daily teaching practice.

During the first year of the program a research study designed to monitor it was conducted by Buwalda-Groeneweg and Hooze, (2015). As a practitioner researcher firmly based in the field of VET in the Netherlands I became intrigued by a sentence written in this monitoring research report (Buwalda-Groeneweg and Hooze, 2015). In the concluding remarks of the research report it can be read that teachers participating in the program expressed the fact that they did not like the name of the program. Being called an excellent teacher did not give them a good feeling. On page 15 in the research report the following passage can be found.

De egalitaire cultuur in het onderwijs leidt ertoe dat mensen niet graag hun hoofd boven het maaiveld willen uitsteken. "Ik ben niet beter dan een ander", is meermaals door docenten in de interviews aangegeven.

In translation into English:

The egalitarian culture in education means that people do not like to raise their heads above ground level. "I am no better than anyone else," teachers repeatedly stated in the interviews.

Participants expressed that although glad to participate in the program they did not want to be called excellent as it made them feel like they stand out from the crowd. It made them feel as though they were no longer standing next to their colleagues but above them which made them feel uncomfortable.

There is something interesting going on with this notion excellence in relation to professionalisation programs for continuous development in the field of education. All actors associated with the professionalisation program use the notion. What is not clear at all is what the actors mean when using the notion. It is not clear if there is a general meaning given to the notion and whether this meaning is given to the notion in other situations as well. This is an observation made by others in the Netherlands as well (Prevoo, 2017).

Here it might be possible to identify a gap in the already existing knowledge on the meaning of excellence. What is meant when using the notion is not clear but it seems to give individuals associated with the notion a feeling of unrest. It might help when the meaning is more clearly understood.

1.1 Main research question

The situation presented above provides the grounds for addressing the lack of clear meaning surrounding "excellence". On this ground the following main research question is formulated.

What meaning is given to the notion of excellence in the context of a specific professionalisation program in a Dutch VET college?

1.2 Sub research questions

As the context or the setting in which something acquires its meaning the professionalisation programme in a Dutch VET college contains a number of different types of actors belonging to different parts of the college. It is therefore necessary to break up the main research question. There are participants in the programme, initiators and trainers associated with the programme. Also of interest is to inquire into the use of the notion of excellence from an organisational perspective. The VET college belongs to a larger educational organisation. To understand the use of the notion it is worth inquiring into the organisational view as well. This leads to the following break-down of the main research question:

1 What meanings are apparent in policies and published academic literature?

2 What meanings are given by the different actors in this context: a) teachers; b) assessors; c) management?

1.3 Approach

Excellence does not hold meaning on its own and is therefore what Rescher (2015) refers to as a syncategorematic concept. At the same time excellence is used in the field of education with relative ease, either in relation to students or teaching programs. In the Dutch VET context excellence is coming into vogue to relate to teaching and teachers as well. Professionalisation programs for further professional development are developed within VET colleges to improve teaching in the same way as there are excellence programs for students that run alongside the general curriculum.

As a practitioner researcher based firmly within a Dutch Secondary VET and VET college and having had positions from teacher to SENCO and middle management to member of general staff further professionalisation has always been part of my own career. Having been a so-called consumer of further development programs I am becoming more a developer of programs such as the program under investigation here. In this role I want to understand better what it is we are doing and what meaning is given to the notion excellence that at first sight is only a name that is given to a professionalisation program but seems to be holding more meaning.

As will be set out in the chapters to follow this introduction it will become clear in more detail why a discourse analytical approach has been used. Here I want to state that using a discourse

analytical approach to finding meaning in a notion provided me with the possibility to undertake this research project within my own organisation. The use of discourse as data provides distance between myself as a researcher and the research context. It helps me to detach myself from the context I am immersed within and already have many assumptions about. More importantly using discourse analysis as a research approach to find meaning around the usage of the notion excellence is the most suitable research approach. This will be explained in the methodology chapter.

A number of educational environments where excellence in relation to teacher professionalisation come together are identified below in chapter two. Next the notion of excellence will be unpacked first by using content analyses with the aim to sort and filter the data corpus to find areas across the data units from which it might be possible to extract information on the meaning given to the notion. Following on from this a number of discourse analytical tools taken from Gee's work (1999) are employed to inquire further into the data. Both approaches consist of several rounds and iterations. It is through such iterations involving going over the data corpus that a full picture is built with which to address the research questions.

To assist these iterations software is used that supports qualitative and mixed method research (Welsh, 2002; "What is NVivo? | NVivo," n.d.). It provides the possibility for researchers to organise, analyse and find insights in unstructured data sets such as the data corpus used in this research project.

1.4 Findings and conclusion

The research approach of discourse analysis with the use of both content analytical and discourse analytical tools has shown that it is possible to find meaning to the notion as used within a context where people work together. This context in which people work together can be explained as being a social setting. People in a social setting use language together. By using language people apply meaning to what they do in the setting. This is called discourse. By taking a structured focus on the discourse used in the context of the professionalisation programme it turned out to be possible to find the meaning given to the notion within the context. It is worth pointing out in this introduction that when addressing the main research question the meaning found feels rather obvious. However the methodological approach and the novel combination of content and discourse analyses meant that surface and deeper meanings could be investigated. These are reflected upon in the conclusion chapter in terms of how they might be efficacious within similar constructionist investigations within educational organisations.

2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The start of the literature review delineates the iterative process adopted to formulate a focus and develop the research questions initially formulated in the research proposal. With this in mind I will look first at what possible meaning or meanings can be found in literature that might be construed as a generically adopted meaning given to the notion.

Then the focus will turn to what the literature reveals about the meaning of excellence from students' and teachers' points of view. This is to be followed by what literature can reveal about excellence from the perspective of an educational organisation in a more managerial sense.

At the end of the literature chapter I will dwell upon the meaning of excellence in research projects undertaken in the field of education. I will note the research that is conducted into the meaning of excellence in Higher Education and in relation to student learning. However there are limited published studies to be found in relation to excellence as used in VET colleges as formulated in the main research question.

2.2 How the literature search was conducted

The search for literature was undertaken in a number of ways. In the first year of the research project attention went to further exploring the notion "excellence" and questioning assumptions that had been formulated at the end of assignment four of this EdD. These assumptions were around the idea that a) using a notion of excellence in a professionalisation program would influence the understanding of the notion by the participants in the program and b) that the meaning given to the notion would be evident in the work of the participants.

Because of this result the decision was made to start with exploring the notion excellence further and try to compile a comprehensive reading list around this central theme. For this word searches were done to find suitable literature and to get a feel for what literature was out there.

Dutch keywords as *excellentie*, *excellentie MBO*, *Excellente Docenten* and *Excellente Docenten MBO* were used for a first search using google scholar. This was also done with the same keywords but then in English. This gave the results as shown in the next matrix.

Table 2.1

Keywords	Hits
Excellentie	3820
Excellentie MBO	741
Excellente Docenten	17200
Excellente docenten MBO	376
Excellence	2700000
Excellence VET	74800
Excellent teachers	977000
Excellent teachers VET	47200

The English search results using the word VET provided a considerable number of hits in relation to veterinary. A new search was done using the following keywords.

Table 2.2

Excellence Vocational education and training	189000
Excellent teachers vocational education and training	272000

In order to bring more structure in the literature search a new search was done using the same keywords but this time through Summon provide by the library of the University of Hull. The filter was set at full text online, scholar and peer review. The content type was set at Journal Article and Book / eBook. This gave the following result.

Table 2.3

Keyword	Journal Article	Book/ eBook
Excellent teachers	183528	6

Excellence	591783	5
Excellence vocational education and training	11745	2
Excellent teachers vocational education and training	8939	2

On the basis of the fact that not a lot of research was identified on excellence in relation to teachers in vocational education the decision was made to broaden the perspective and look for excellence in teachers from a broad educational perspective. Primary as well as secondary and higher education were included. During the course of the literature review, literature results from a business administrative perspective emerged. The decision was made not to delve too deeply into literature primarily aimed at the business sector but focus on what possible effects of this field are on education.

The literature search has next been approached as an iterative process by reading articles found in the results from database searches. The outcome of the close study of the selected articles was that a further snowballing method was used. Snowballing as a method in a literature review can be used in two ways, forward and or backward and both ways were used. By forward snowballing relevant citations found in articles selected on the basis of the initial database search are used. Backward snowballing is a method of using the reference lists in articles to select additional relevant reading as Jalali and Wohlin, (2012) and Webster and Watson (2002) explain in their articles.

Articles related to higher education have been used because through the snowballing process it became clear that research in relation to excellence and education has been done in the field of higher education. Research projects focussing on other than Dutch or English speaking countries are included in the literature review after it was noted that there was a paucity of work in relation to this research project. This finding showed a gap in the existing literature. The complete result of the iterative process can be found at the end of this thesis (see **Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.** on page **Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.** **Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.**).

While I was not looking for a global perspective on the meaning given to excellence or a focus that originated from the research question the iterative process did bring up results from

research across the globe. Results from across the globe helped to put together a picture of what universal meaning of excellence might be found.

While conducting the literature review the main research question (see 1.1 Main research question on page 2) developed itself and the sub questions (see 1.2 Sub research questions on page 3) were formulated.

2.3 A universal meaning given to excellence within published academic literature

What is meant by excellence is not at all clear. This observation has been proffered a number of times. Prevoo (2017) emphasises the need to define excellence when used to select pupils. From his research it became apparent that when teachers were asked to identify excellent pupils only half of the pupils that were selected had an excellence score in a national final test at the end of primary school. This call for a more defined meaning in relation to excellence emanates from the field of humanities and social sciences as well (Scott, 2015). The problem with not defining excellence is that it is difficult to understand what to look for and talk about; or as Coffield and Edward (2009) argued when an un-explicated meaning is given to excellence its true meaning becomes arbitrary.

Additionally excellence gains meaning only in relation to how it is being used because as Rescher (2015:86) states excellence is a “syncategorematic concept”. In other words it has no meaning when it stands on its own so has to be used in relation to something else. This use of excellence in relation to something else is present in the following universal definition found in the work of Barzun (1996): “Excellence means excelling, which means exerting the will to improve on nature according to rule”. He goes on explaining that to excel talented individuals need to make firm demands on themselves. At the same time these demands are set by the context that distributes and rewards performance. In other words excellence in individuals is regulated by a context. What the needs of this context are might be of influence in forms of regulation.

What the reaction of participants of the program has shown is that the use of the notion in relation to their profession has led to unease. Excellence is associated with being better than someone else and this is argued to be in juxtaposition to the aim of equality in education (Barzun, 1959a, de Groot 2017). It was Barzun (1959) who mentioned that although the notion was frequently used in relation to objects it became unwelcome when used in relation to persons. The idea of bringing an idea other than that of equality within the social setting especially that of education was unheard of. Barzun (1959:140) explained that to talk about

excellence was to talk about bringing intellect into discourse and that not to talk about excellence was in a way stating that being excellent is not everything. The fundamental idea under excellence is excelling as Barzun (1996) has already expressed.

Excellence is also looked upon as an element to measure or define quality. For instance Rescher (2015:85) places excellence at the extreme positive side of a ranking scale of quality order. More specifically excellence is placed “at or near the positive pole” of a grading scale in quality assessment. Other rankings on this scale are: superior, good, mediocre and inferior.

Excellence also gains meaning when used in relation to hard work. To achieve excellence either effort is needed or it comes to one as a God given talent (Rescher, 2015), whereas someone else might be able to become excellent by practice. Barzun (1959) did not only speak of effort that is needed to achieve excellence but talks about there being a price of excellence. The price is the acknowledgement of moments of pain and failure in gaining excellence. He even mentioned that there is a certain harshness in achieving excellence. The final outcome will be similar though only the route towards excellence differs. When excellence is something that can be gained as is clear from Little et al. (2007) it becomes a commodity and obtainable for many individuals or institutions.

Looking for a universal meaning for excellence has led to my understanding that the notion needs to be used in relation to something else to gain a meaning. Universal themes used in relation to excellence are related to measuring quality by comparing outcomes in order to compile rankings.

So far the literature review has found that when using the notion excellence in the field of education it is often used in relation to excellence in pupils. This will probably bring with it a focus on excellence in teaching as well since teaching excellent pupils asks for outstanding teaching. Excellence is also used in connection with organisational development. A single universal meaning for excellence other than Barzun’s cannot be found. What the literature does reveal is that a universal meaning of excellence ties in very closely with elements such as quality, talent, motivation, performance, efficiency and effectiveness. The next paragraphs will inquire into these elements in more detail and explain their cohesion with the notion of excellence.

2.3.1 Excellence meaning continuous improving

With the definition of excellence formulated by Barzun (1996) it is a small step to understand the literature around excellence from a business organisational point of view. When excellence

is about excelling it means that educational organisations need to think about how to excel. One of the key factors here is the idea of continuous improvement.

Continuously improving to excel and hence gain or reach excellence is accompanied by a focus on standards. Standards are needed to be able to compare quality between different actors. Teachers are used to being measured. This has been picked up by a number of scholars such as Ball (2003) and Biesta (2015) to mention two.

A review into excellence in teaching and learning in higher education conducted by Little et al.(2007) for example shows that the notion of excellence is used to make it possible to show those educational contexts or settings such as schools or educational teams that stand out from the crowd. As such the use of the notion makes it possible to support competition between professional contexts or even nations in the form of international league tables. The review found that excellence when used in policy documents is used to refer to quality of education in much the same way as it is looked at in corporations.

Through the work of Little et al. (2007) it becomes clear that Excellence is a notion not only used to express competition between colleges on a national basis but between teaching systems on an international level as well. This ties in with the use of market forces as a concept in education to stimulate competition between schools. The idea is that competition between schools and making the outcomes public might enhance quality of education (CPB, 2001). This “performative use” (Little et al. 2007:12) of excellence becomes clear in the policy goals set in the action plan in the Netherlands which focusses among other items on the professionalisation of teachers. This focus on performativity and striving for the best through the use of excellence in relation to teacher professionalisation and competition between educational systems cannot be without an effect on teachers.

This not only becomes clear from the work by Ball (2015, 2003) who argues that a focus on educational change by measuring outcomes of teaching changes the way teachers work. Sahlberg (2011, 2007) provides the same insights from a Finnish perspective. Finland has an educational system internationally examined because of the way it keeps appearing high in the international league table rankings (Chung, 2010). According to these scholars the PISA surveys have in general brought to light that the quality of teachers is at the core of the educational development needed to raise quality of education. By bringing teachers to the core of educational change one could argue this necessitates making them better equipped with the tools to make changes. In this might lie a rationale for the professionalisation programmes.

Ball (2003) argues that this focus on performance and educational reform by the increased use of numbers and statistics not only changes what teachers do but also changes what teachers are. The way a teacher teaches changes when due to performativity figures they are required to teach according to standards aimed at excellence. When standards dictate what will be looked at when collecting data and analysing data to measure outcomes of teaching a teacher will have to make changes to the way he or she teaches. This might also influence a teacher's teaching style.

Hence excellent teaching can in some of these cases be better described as efficient or effective teaching. The technique of teaching is not of importance but the outcomes are. These are not the individual outcomes for pupils but the overall outcomes of teaching institutions and schools and these are in comparison with each other within and across nations. One could argue that with a policy which focusses on output and league tables the need to be clear what one means when using the notion excellence becomes important.

It seems reasonable to argue that professionals working in the field of education have to deal with activities well known from the field of quality control and process management (Morley, 2003; Seymour, 1992). Filling in lists and ticking boxes on forms to present to others what the activities have been while teaching is common practice. Such measuring of activities in education or even measuring education in all its elements relates to showing what the quality of education is and by doing so brings to the surface what the outcomes are of teaching and education. Ball (2003) terms this situation where indicators of quality are taken as definitions of quality performativity.

Performativity, he argues, is a new mode of state regulation which makes it possible to govern in what Rose (1993:285) describes as 'advanced liberal' way. It requires individual practitioners to organise themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations. It also requires them to set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live and work in a reality of calculation and control. The new performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence. For some, this is an opportunity to make a success of themselves, for others it portrays inner conflicts, inauthenticity and resistance. It is also suggested by Ball (2003) that performativity produces clouded rather than transparent views as individuals and organisations take ever greater care in the ways of reporting towards such goals. As such to write reports towards the set goals might lead to desired outcomes.

The attractiveness and need for measurement comes from a fear of and desire for control according to some scholars (Ball, 2003; Biesta, 2015). They propose that numbers give a feeling

of security. Whether it is true or not is a fair question although rarely asked. In measuring it is about comparing one thing with another. At the same time it is not always clear whether this underlying standard against which things are compared is certain.

According to Biesta (2017; 2015) this desire for measurement and control can be seen in the light of the transformation of the welfare state to that of a neo-liberalistic state. Governments are no longer concerned with defining the common good but deal with defining notions such as quality, customers and choice (Biesta, 2015; Morley, 2003). Governments act as process managers in the political debate and use tools that come with process management to try to control the quality of common goods through standards of performativity. Helpful as this might be it does not question how meaningful these standards are. All that is known according to Morley (2003) is that standards are used to inspect what goes on in education and that it is against these standards that the field of education is held accountable.

In the study by Morley (2003) on the quality of education in higher education one finds that the process of inspection against set standards has brought about a system of continuous improvement into the field of education. Good is no longer good enough. Things can always be better so improvement is a day to day endeavour even in the world of education. That this constant pressure of improving is having its effects on teachers and teaching is not something automatically thought of. Morley (2003) in her study did find that it has a profound effect on professionals working in the field of education. Her study can be regarded as an exploration of the relationship between quality and power. It examined power relations that organise and facilitate quality assurance in higher education. In other words there is an unequal power balance between those promoting quality and academics going about their job. The aim of the study was to uncover some of the ways in which quality was experienced by academics and managers in higher education. Quality here relates to performance, standards and output.

She established through this research that continuous improvement in higher education has a surface agenda that is credible and desirable in the context of global change and living in a risk orientated society. It is desirable to keep up with a global system of constant change and by continuously improving education the field has got a means to do so. The agenda under the surface, in other words an agenda that is not directly visible (Morley, 2003) is theorised in terms of derived concepts of government ability which are further developed by Ball (2015, 2003) and Lorenz (2012). This theory is about the influence governments want to have on what happens within organisations such as that of education. There is apparently no direct influence because schools are free to set the broadly formulated goals. Below the surface, there is

certainly influence when the government focuses on a system of assessments and inspection supervision. O'Neill and Palmer (2004) and Powell (2000) also explored this from the perspective of assessing performance in education.

Linking quality assurance to continuous improvement as strong policy elements is identified by Ball (2009, 2003) as a means to exemplify the trend of steering at a distance in public policy. This trend gives the appearance of decentralising governmental influence by giving educational institutions autonomy. It is interesting to note that initially quality assurance was introduced in industries as a regulatory device for production processes rather than a check on the quality of products themselves.

2.3.2 Excellence meaning a level of quality

Education is the starting point to a new and better society as Biesta and Säfström (2011) state. One could argue that the focus on education in this framework of education is on the inequality of education. If education needs to be better it is obviously not delivering what it needs to one could argue. At the same time with a focus on continuous improvement inequality is kept in its place, not only inequality between schools or teams but also between professionals who need to perform according to set standards. By keeping the need to improve and aim for the best as the focus is on in the world of education in this new era (Biesta, 2015; Morley, 2003) one could readily argue that those who were deemed the best or excellent 5 years ago are definitely not so against today's standards.

Judging quality of education or teaching used to be part of the standards used among professionals. One professional was able to assess what the quality of another professional was. This was also the case in the field of education. Professionals working closely together were able to assess each other's quality. The professional standard was the key to assessing the quality of education (Lorenz, 2012). This worked in a small context where the professionals knew each other. With the system of public management a broader focus than that of a local context came into being because quality of education needed to be compared between nations when assessing quality. Within this broader focus a professional standard was no longer suitable. This led to a shift in definitions of quality (O'Neill and Palmer, 2004). The shift describes the situation of professionals being held accountable for good performance through process improvement and showing best practice but no longer as the actors who can assess the quality of their work by applying their professional standards. Lorenz (2012) has described this through use of the phrase new public management.

Another example for this shift in judging quality and the use of a new set of standards can be found in the LEAN way of working that has entered the field of education in which optimisation of work processes and continuous improvement are at the centre of attention. These indicators of continuous improvement, optimising work process and sharing best practices are chosen to make measurement and control of the quality of education easy and reproductive. This latter approach asks for more than set standards to measure. It asks for more indicators that are hard to generalise (Biesta, 2017; Morley, 2003).

Having indicators is also used when assessment enters the educational setting of learning and teaching according to Hughes (2011). Indicators can come in the form of grades or feedback to provide information about whether standards are maintained and goals reached. In general, three manners of assessing are used: summative (also known as norm referenced), formative (otherwise known as criterion referenced) and ipsative (Hughes, 2011). Summative assessment looks at whether the degree criteria are met while formative assessment measures the progress made in reaching the set criteria. Ipsative assessment compares a performance against a previous performance.

Jörg (2011) brings into the debate the contention that because of the complexity of the field of education and its being what he calls a potential non-linear complex reality it is important to think of what the reality of education should look like instead of taking about what indicators of the quality of education should be. Biesta (2006; 2015) brings to this debate about education that it should take the form of a dialogue about the content, purpose and relationships needed in education.

2.3.3 Excellence meaning funding

The language of quality in education is more a language about generating the best outcomes and ties in with the universal meaning of excellence linked with efficiency and effectiveness. In relation to Biesta's (2015) dialogue presented above one could argue that language associated with the so called good education is having an effect on education itself.

This language associated with good education is also found in the Netherlands. Not only in the last decade but also in the last couple of years a lot is happening in relation to the VET sector in the Netherlands. National and international councils focus on lifelong learning, skills agendas and what is needed from teacher professionalisation in relation to these topics. A paper by van der Veer et al. (2014) on how to be equipped for life indicates what people need for a changing labour market in the 21st century. The general belief is that jobs for life will no

longer exist and that individuals on the labour market should be able to move flexibly between jobs, learning and caring (van der Veer et al., 2014). Lifelong learning as a concept has also received criticism from scholars like Fleming (2016) for example as it connects to a broadly neo-liberal agenda and turns the focus towards individuals and away from societal structures and equalities.

Lifelong learning is also an agenda for educational professionals in vocational education and training. Lifelong learning has always been present in the field of vocational education and training but is only recently a term on the political agenda after a report requested by the Dutch Educational Council was published on the question why lifelong learning has not developed faster (Golsteyn, 2012). It has always been part of the field of vocational training and education but in a less explicit manner. According to the OECD skills monitor the Netherlands has already got a strong public- private system of vocational education and training (Zaken, 2017). This is present in a so called triple helix system. In such a system government makes agreements over quality and continuous improvement with social partners and the business sector. The social partners ask for employability of the workforce and provide social plans and the business sectors set the human capital agenda and seek innovation (Cörvers and van der Meer, 2018; van der Meer, 2017; van der Veer et al., 2014).

In the middle of this public-private system one finds the VET sector. According to Braun et al. (2011) and the Dutch educational council (Onderwijsraad, 2011b; Zaken, 2017) this also presents an important challenge of upgrading teaching through professionalisation of teaching teams and teachers. This is often called professional capital (Bryson, 2015; Daniel et al., 2010; Hargreaves et al., 2013; Klatter, n.d.; van Veen et al., 2010) and can be found in how the professional organisation in schools is organised. Professional capital as an outcome of the human capital agenda manifest itself through the capacity of teachers and staff to make effective judgements within their work but also through the skills and talents present in the teachers and staff in a school. A final element through which professional capital manifests itself is through the way teachers and staff work together on a collegial level. Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) name these examples of professional capitalism; decisional, human and social capital.

Upgrading teaching through professionalisation of teachers and teaching teams affects how teachers act in class, what management views in schools are and how governmental organisations assess teaching and educational quality. Educational quality in the Netherlands is assessed through education inspection norms but also along the line of outcomes and output.

This becomes evident through the financing system of the educational sector for example. VET colleges are paid in relation to the number of students who graduate within the time set as a norm for a particular course. The idea behind this is that when the education is of a good quality students should be able to finish their education within the time set with schools paid if students do finish. If students take longer schools get paid less. Norms are set for dropout rates, study value and results of workplace learning. This specific scrutiny of quality is anticipated through the construct of teacher professionalisation as Harris and Biesta (2017) explain in their description of the Dutch educational system.

One could start to believe that through this focus on norms and reaching goals or continuous improvement getting to a point of quality or even being excellent is clear and obtainable for all. All one has to do is adhere to the indicators set and work towards reaching these. If it works as expressed above one could argue that by focussing on norms and a system of continuous improving practice in education excellence or quality can be achieved.

Both Biesta (2017, 2015) and Dewey (2004) as well as Morley (2003) argue there is more than measurable indicators that determine whether a high standard of education is attained or provided for. By focussing on measurable indicators and standardised norms the risk is that elements which are harder to measure because they are not all together clear but important for education are not examined, or even discarded as not being valuable. This tacit knowledge according to Sennett (2009) and Vermeulen et al. (2014) is just as important for becoming an expert in one's field of practice because it is the embodiment of information and skills learned in practice.

2.3.4 What students mean by excellence in relation to education

Students or pupils make up part of the context or setting under inquiry. To achieve a broad perspective on the meaning given to excellence in the field of education the literature review must therefore not omit the students' or pupils' perspectives on excellence in education. In the literature it can be found that pupils and students tend not to speak of excellent teachers but of good teachers.

Research by Beishuizen et al. (2001) used student voices through interviews, observations and free essay writing to investigate what students perceive as good teachers. They started with exploring and analysing the content of the free essays. The aim was to explore the perspectives on characteristics attributed to good teachers so these could be studied further.

In their research they asked both primary and secondary students on their views of good teachers. Alongside students teachers were part of this research as well.

The student group was subdivided into three. There was a group of young students, eleven to twelve year olds and sixteen year olds. On this Beishuizen et al. (2001:189) found that teachers were typified as followed. Young students typified good teachers as careful, well groomed, attractive and intelligent. The eleven to twelve year olds accentuated the prevailing didactic role and ability to uphold a well organised class. The sixteen year olds came up with a large number of attributions such as: professional; devoted or brilliant, to typify good teachers.

Based on the outcome of this research Beishuizen et al. (2001:188) identified two characteristics of good teachers which they called personality and ability characteristics. From the personality characteristic a good teacher has an even and mature nature. A good teacher is considered to be kind, serious enthusiastic and possibly even good looking. The ability characteristics of a good teacher are presented through the skills, knowledge and experience of the teacher and their capability to execute teaching skills in a natural and structured manner.

The iterative process of the literature review led to a study by Song and Chen (2013:120) into the way Chinese students gave meaning to the notion of excellent teaching. In this research roughly the same characteristics as those found by Beishuizen (2001) emerged. The research was undertaken by making use of a questionnaire set out among a group of 2000 students from four different universities. Through exploratory factor analysis a model of excellent teaching was developed. Six characteristics were labelled. Each label was worked out into a number of behavioural characteristics which could be identified in teachers.

The identified characteristics by Song and Chen (2013) covered items related to excellent teachers being competent instructors with an eye for student engagement and learning and classroom management. In addition characteristics which belong to relational aspects such as the ability to assist the progress of students through care and attention were identified.

In a study by Feldman (1996) it became clear that students found it important that good teachers were clear in their instructions, had well prepared lessons and an organised manner in their teaching. Also deemed important was the ability of good teachers to motivate students and stimulate the interest in the course by students. The elements are all rather shallow. They seem to be on what is visible from the outside. What a good teacher holds over and above merely these outward elements did not become clear in this study.

The search for a meaning given to excellence from a student's perspective has indicated that it is very much tied in with individual teachers. No general standards are used by students or pupils to decide on the quality of teachers and his or her excellence in teaching.

2.3.5 What teachers mean by excellence in relation to education

In some of the studies found voices of both students and teachers are examined together. In this literature review their voices are presented separately in order to provide structure. Therefore Beishuizen et al. (2001) is examined again. In their aforementioned research on perspectives on good teachers they not only looked at this through student voices but also through the voice of teachers themselves.

Beishuizen et al. (2001:196) presented the description of good teachers through the voice of teachers themselves. They found that teachers treated good teachers in the first place as teachers with the ability to establish personal relationships with their students. This characteristic was then followed by the characteristics related to ability.

In the research by Kane et al. (2004) into excellent tertiary teaching the research design was such that it captured teacher voices and behaviour in practice. A multi-method approach was used to allow for the capture and identification of the intricate aspects of teaching. Teachers were interviewed on an individual basis, videotaped while teaching and interviewed again after examining the playback of the videotaped teaching.

The research represented five characteristics or what Kane et al. (2004:292) called attributes of excellent teachers. An excellent teacher holds characteristics associated with being an expert because of the possession of subject knowledge. The excellent teacher can be identified because of the skills associated with good pedagogical skills. Teaching can only occur as long as there is an interpersonal relationship between teacher and student according to the research. The fourth characteristic can be described as the excellent teacher having a personality, meaning that the teacher shows a certain amount of enthusiasm in one's profession and is able to reveal personal aspects through one's teaching. The final characteristic is what Kane et al. (2004:296) classify as the "research/teaching nexus". This characteristic describes the interaction between the two activities of teaching. If one follows the line that excellent teachers are those who research their own practice as expressed earlier one could argue that excellent teachers have the skill to let these two activities work together. That means they do not approach them as separate activities but they are able to enhance their research work through their teaching activities and vice versa.

This last characteristic might be considered specific for teaching in tertiary education where teaching and research or inquiring one's own practice go hand in hand. One could argue that when examined in a more abstract manner what excellent teachers here are able to do is to combine different tasks related to their profession in such a way that it strengthens their teaching abilities. Kane et al.'s (2004) research revealed a common characteristic which might shed more light on this linking element.

The research showed that the excellent teachers committed themselves to periodic reflection on their teaching. According to Kane et al. (2004:306) it was the reflection which made it possible for the excellent teachers to investigate their teaching and by doing so find the best way to combine all characteristics attributed to excellent teaching to excel in their teaching. This characteristic of reflective practice was also identified by Elton (1998). Further characteristics identified by Elton (1998) can be placed under the ability of an excellent teacher to organise and present his or her teaching on the one hand while on the other the ability to form a relationship with pupils and have an eye for the progress the pupils make.

In a review on the attributes of exemplary teachers by Horan (1991:23) a number of characteristics were identified as well. The teachers showed a thorough subject knowledge, were organised in their teaching, engaged with their students and provided ample feedback on the progress the students made.

A study by Chen et al. (2012) into the manner teachers in a Chinese province see excellent teaching worked on a previous study by the same scholar. It asked teachers to indicate in what manner they agreed with 58 statements on excellent teaching. This led to a model on excellent teaching as seen through the eyes of teacher which was based on five characteristics (Chen et al., 2012:941). The excellent teacher makes sure he or she is a professional learner, focuses on the student and engages with the students. An excellent teacher aims for the development of students as learners and has an orientation towards exams (Chen et al. 2012:945).

Another line of thought about what teachers might mean by excellence can be found in the work of Biesta (2017) and Lorenz (2012) on professionals and the teaching profession. Establishing excellence used to be based on standards set among professionals. This involved knowing each other and each other's work. This can also be found in the work of Beishuizen et al. (2001). With the focus on efficiency and effectiveness of education and relating this to the funding of education (see 2.3.3 Excellence meaning funding on page 14) excellence is no longer decided by using a set of professional standards but asks teachers to work along a line of managerial standards (Lorenz, 2012).

2.3.6 What excellence means in Dutch educational policies

The sections above show that the literature so far has revealed that a meaning given to excellence in the field of education coincides with changes in the manner in which quality of education is judged or assessed. As education is part of the public sector and has always been part of coalition agreements in Dutch administrations it is interesting to look at what ways managing education from a governmental perspective have developed.

The teaching profession has only recently become placed at the centre of attention with policymakers and school leaders in the Netherlands. The focus on innovation and development in VET has mainly been aimed at educational concepts and what this would mean for the teaching profession has been missed out. For decades there has been no or only a minimum of investment in developing teacher professionalism (Broos and Korte, 2007).

This situation started to change about a decade ago with the publication of the well-known McKinsey report in which worldwide educational systems were compared (McKinsey, 2007). The report showed that if one wanted to belong to the educational top the aim had to be to get the best people to become teachers and give them the best possible teacher training. In other words the quality of VET stands or falls with the quality of teacher professionalism (Daniel et al., 2010). This insight in combination with a dwindling supply of young teachers and disappointing results of all educational innovations and reforms has led to more attention on teacher professionalisation in the Netherlands (Hermanussen and McDaniel, 2012).

In the Netherlands this heightened attention on teacher professionalisation became very clear from the end of 2007. At the end of this academic year a number of governmental policies (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2007; Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2007; Onderwijsraad, 2007) on enhancing the quality and position of teachers were published based on the coalition agreement of the fourth Balkenende cabinet (Ministerie van Algemene, 2007). This led to an action plan. In this action plan a number of measures were taken aimed at enhancing the strength of the teaching profession and working towards more professional schools as well as improving financial rewards for teachers (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2007).

At first the focus was very broad. The action plan was aimed at the broad educational sector, from primary to higher education. The elaboration of the action plan came in the form of a quality agenda 2008-2011 for teacher education and training (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2008a). The ambition in the quality agenda was to get more academics into teaching, to be more selective at the start of the teacher training programs and to form a vision on how to make teaching a profession with a modern perspective (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2008b).

It is in this quality agenda that the notion excellence is used explicitly without providing more content than stating that “there has to be more space for excellence” (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2008a, p9). In 2011 more content is provided in a report asked for by the minister for education on how excellence among teachers can be promoted (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2011; Onderwijsraad, 2011). In this report a plea is made to give the better performing teachers the function of role models. This is to show the appreciation for excellence among teachers. Excellent teachers should be given space to share their expertise with colleagues and participate in educational development and innovation according to the Onderwijsraad (2011a). The report also advised appointing excellent teachers in all schools at a ratio of one in twenty teachers so in each school 5% of its teachers should be excellent (Onderwijsraad, 2011, p16).

Around this time the VET sector in the Netherlands was the focus of attention in politics and society after negative publicity in the media. In a reaction to this negative attention the minister of education asked for an investigation into the organisation and governance of the VET sector (Oudemans, 2010). The conclusions of the commission could be summarised as “it being time for quality” (Vergeer, 2012 p40). More specifically, as Oudemans, (2010) and Vergeer (2012) contend, good education can be provided for when one has good teachers. Good teachers need time to provide for focussed instruction and clearly structured education. There needs to be a balance between taught teaching hours, practical teaching hours and self-study. Last but not least there should be a constant focus on quality according to the commission.

These conclusions found their way into an action plan “Focus op Vakmanschap” (Focus on Craftsmanship) specifically designed for the VET sector (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2011). In this action plan were specific goals such as good, initial vocational education for young people through more teaching time, better exams and professional teachers aimed at improving the quality of education. The action plan built on another earlier action plan on enhancing the quality of teaching (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2007; Onderwijsraad, 2011a) and by doing so provided a policy basis for teacher professionalisation in the VET sector.

With the action plan came funding for VET colleges to set up professionalisation programs to enhance the quality of teaching and to set in motion the ambition to bring to light the 5% of excellent teachers of all those within the college. All VET colleges in the Netherlands were autonomous on how to provide for professionalisation programs. The action plan only showed what goals had to be reached. It did not get more specific than articulating that the number of drop outs had to be reduced, that the governance of the colleges had to be improved and that there had to be enough actual teaching time. Quality in teaching had to be improved through

professionalisation programs for teachers. The outcome for both parents and students should be that they show better appreciation for craftsmanship (Chin-A-Fat et al., 2016). Excellence was a word used more and more frequently but what it actually entailed was not very clear. One might say that, when international inquiry into this is looked at, all this attention on quality and excellence is steering a focus on the output and outcomes of education.

Ongoing or continuous professionalisation of VET teachers often takes places in collaboration with teacher training colleges (Cörvers and van der Meer, 2018; Daniel et al., 2010; Snoek et al., 2018). For already qualified teachers this often takes place on the job in the form of taking formal degrees on a part time basis or informally by participating in programs provided for by the organisation in which they work (Daniel et al., 2010; Hermanussen and McDaniel, 2012; Snoek et al., 2018).

Continuous professionalisation is needed to be able to adapt to ongoing changes made to education (Snoek et al., 2018). At the same time the need to perform better in education on a global scale requires continuous professionalisation as well. This becomes apparent in the Dutch governmental focus on quality in education through the years (van der AA and van der Ploeg, 2018). When one looks at the main Dutch educational policies and action plans related to teacher quality from the early 1990's onward the following documents can be found.

In 1993 under the third cabinet of Lubbers the department of education came with a policy memorandum (*Vitaal leraarschap*, 1993) in a reaction to a report on the teaching profession (Es, 1993). The themes of the memorandum were teacher professionalisation in modern labour organisations and quality of teachers and teacher training colleges. The measures set against the themes were the development of a professional profile and providing a school budget to differentiate via job function and tasks.

In 1999 under the second cabinet Kok saw the publication of the report on the modernisation of the personnel policy and terms of employment. Other themes therein were quality of the profession, diversity in the teaching job and new routes towards teaching. Measures set in order to work towards the goals addressed in the themes came in the form of the decentralisation and standardisation of terms of employment, a quality law in relation to teaching and measurements set at enhancing or improving and sustaining quality in education (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 1999).

This coincides with the Bologna Agreement (1999) which advocated working together towards an internationally competitive European Higher Education Zone that would encourage mobility and employability of its citizens. At the same time working in line with the agreement would

lead to more compatibility and comparability of the higher education systems (Huisman et al., 2012). This agreement was signed by European ministers for education and set a European qualification standard.

Eight years later in 2007 another action plan related to the teaching profession and quality emerged (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2007). This again had a strong impact as it influenced the teaching profession through setting up a professional association and funds for further development for teachers. It influenced the teacher training colleges through a stronger focus on control for those who wanted to start at a teacher training college and for the colleges a stronger focus on the output as well. Agreements on performance were made in relation to diversity and workload and control on the quality of teaching was implemented. At the same time initiatives for better financial rewards were operationalised.

Finally in the year before the professionalisation program at the centre of this research started a 7 year plan or Lerarenagenda (Teachersagenda) was presented under the second cabinet Rutte (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2013). This vast agenda contained themes from the level of teacher training colleges to the level of individual schools. It showed the task for teachers and management in schools was to transform schools into learning and developing organisations. To support this transformation a vast amount of measurements were compiled. Items such as continuous improvement of personal development and increased professional space were described in output indicators to make them quantifiable.

When looking at these developments a picture emerges in which traditional schools in which a teacher is an autonomous professional in a classroom are transformed into labour organisations with progress reports and professional development plans. The latest themes show more focus on teacher quality and less on themes to enhance the quantity of teachers. Implementation of all national plans is in the domain of school boards and teacher training colleges (van der AA and van der Ploeg, 2018).

When it comes to quality in relation to education it is difficult to define what quality means. It is clear that it is related to growth in pupil learning or value-added learning and it relates to the domains known in education as pedagogy, didactical and school and classroom organisational skills in teachers. To better understand where this growing focus on quality and development comes from it is best to look at the period each cabinet existed in. As the previous paragraphs indicate it starts with the third Cabinet Lubbers in 1993 which coincides with the period when a global focus on market forces in relation to society became more apparent. Around the same time as the third cabinet Lubbers New Labour and its 3rd way politics was in cabinet in the UK, while on an international level ten years earlier in 1983 the International Democratic Union

was formed. It is argued that this period marks the moment in time that an economical system based on neo-liberal ideas became official (Mudge, 2008).

From this time on education saw the introduction of tuition fees and deregulation. In 1999 during the second cabinet Kok this was written in a policy paper on an “open education labour market” (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 1999). In 2001 this was followed by an in-depth study into the influence of market forces on education (Dyck, 2001). By 2005 the working of the neoliberal ideas and economical system was so well established that a number of core values could be identified (Ball, 2009; Biesta, 2017; Mudge, 2008). These core values are about institutionalised normative principles or standards. Individualisation is what all is aimed at as well as a market-based competition over other modes of organisation. Briefly it is about investing, working and improving one self.

The exploration as described in the previous sections shows that the educational policies in relation to teacher and educational development came about in a political period that not only nationally but also globally focused on what is now known as a neo-liberalism by people such as Attick (2017), Ball (2009), Lorenz (2012) and Mudge (2008) to name only a few. In the late eighties early nineties the Netherlands joined this trend of privatisation and system of performance measurement and accreditation in education (Bakker et al., 2005). The next matrix provides this overview.

Year	Global	Dutch Educational Policies
1983	Forming of International Democratic Union (IDU, n.d.)	
1990	New Labour's 3 rd Way Politics	
1993		Vitaal Leraarschap
1999		Maatwerk voor morgen.
2001		Marktwerking in het onderwijs
2005	Core values of neo liberalism are described by IDU	
2007		Actieplan Leerkracht van Nederland

2013		De lerarenagenda 2013-2020
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To understand the link between neo-liberalism and Dutch educational policies from the early eighties to the present day one should have an overview of the Dutch cabinets during those years. It is not the intention to go into Dutch politics too deeply in this thesis but to understand the link one should know what the political orientation in the Netherlands was during the years described. In the Netherlands there is a multi-party system. Cabinets are formed across parties by forming coalitions between parties (KELT, 2018). Over the described period the following coalition cabinets have been in office (Parlement, n.d.; Rijksoverheid, n.d.). The name of the cabinet corresponds with the prime minister at that time; in between brackets the name of the political party that is part of the coalition is presented.

Period	Cabinet
1982 - 1986	Lubbers I. Coalition between Christen Democrats (CDA) and Liberals (VVD).
1986 – 1989	Lubbers II. Again, a coalition between the same two parties.
1989 – 1994	Lubbers III. Coalition between Christen Democrats (CDA) and Labour (PvDA)
1994 – 1998	Kok I. Coalition between Labour (PvDA), Liberals (VVD) and Liberal Democrats (D’66). Also known as the first purple coalition.
1998 – 2002	Kok II. Second purple coalition between the same parties.
2002 – 2003	Balkenende I. Central right coalition between Christen Democrats (CDA), Liberals (VVD) and a new party orientated towards the right spectrum (LPF) with the late frontman Pim Fortuyn
2003 – 2006	Balkenende II. Central right coalition between Christen Democrats (CDA), Liberals (VVD) and Liberal Democrats (D’66).

2006 – 2007	Balkenende III. A minority coalition between Christen Democrats (CDA) and Liberals (VVD).
2007 – 2010	Balkenende IV. Coalition between Christen Democrats (CDA), Labour (PvDA) and the Cristian Union.
2010 – 2012	Rutte I. A minority coalition between Liberals (VVD) and Christen Democrats (CDA).
2012 – 2017	Rutte II. Coalition between Liberals (VVD) and Labour (PvDA).

What becomes clear from this overview is the fact that in all but two cabinets the liberals (VVD) have been part of the coalition. On this basis one could firmly state that a liberal perspective has always been part of policies in the Netherlands in the period presented.

From the end of the last decade onward the neo-liberal economic system was strongly followed in the Netherlands (Lorenz, 2012). More recently this strong focus on managing education from a neo-liberalistic perspective begins to shift to a more western European perspective also known as the Rhinelandic model or what Lorenz (2012) calls classical liberalism. A main difference between the two is the focus on the individual in the Anglo-American or Neo-Liberalistic model and the focus on the collective in the Rhinelandic or classical liberalistic model. The interest of the stakeholders in the Rhinelandic model espouses the idea that stakeholder's interests are in relation to the environment, employment opportunities, innovation and developments in the arts and sciences. The interest of the stakeholders in the Anglo-American model focuses mainly on shareholders' value in the sense of profit maximalisation (Albert, 1993; Bakker et al., 2005; Hodges and Woolcock, 1993).

2.3.7 Excellence in education in a neo-liberalistic age of quality

The influence of liberalistic governments on education is not to be underestimated. Is it not just a political philosophy. Rose (1993) in his essay raises the argument that liberalism can be handled as a formula of governmental rule instead of a political or social culture. To underpin his argument, he looks back at the evolution of former soviet states and notes that their transition to a market economy has brought about a growth in organisational experts, consultants and specialists. Rose argues this development into a service sector leaves not one specialist in a certain field but produces a range of specialists all competing as is common in a market economy.

The former soviet states have not invented this increase of specialist knowledge in individuals. Instead of keeping specialist knowledge central government decided what specialism was needed and in what quantities. This system is borrowed from the Western countries where it was already present. The focus on the development into a market economy is directly linked to national prosperity. Through individual or entrepreneurial competition in a market, not only can companies prosper but also individual nations.

Keeping a grip on the economic growth and the individuals within the economic domain become systems in themselves with a task to perform within the system to enable it to prosper. These systems need to check whether performance is on target or that actions are needed to steer or control to get systems back on target. Rose (1993) introduces the term machines in relation to these steering or governing systems. He argues that individuals or groups in the system therefore become machines in a factory that is a larger system, say a nation or a business, aimed at making it better in competing with others in the market system and letting it prosper.

This leads to a preoccupation with the number of ways available to steer, manage, lead or guide the way individuals behave and develop themselves in relation to the notion of governing. When governing is related to development of change it is important to think about the instrument at hand to get the change or development underway. A focus on improving the individual becomes important because it is an element in the factory that is making change happen. The better the quality of the individual the better the outcome of the product.

With the improvement of the individual the aspect of knowledge enters the frame. To develop as an individual, the improvement of new knowledge must be obtained. This connection between knowledge and governing ties in with the first of five features associated with liberalism described by Rose (1993). If governing is as working a machinery as he introduced there is need for knowledge about the machine but also individuals who are able to work the machine. In other words the individual needs to have knowledge about the machine but also about the product the machine is making.

The system dictates the sort of professionalisation needed to attain the goals set. This steering at a distance ties in to the idea of authority of expertise (Rose,1993). The one making the choices on what expertise is needed in a certain situation has the authority and is therefore in sole possession of the means to govern.

These elements of different ways to govern or formula of rule are what Rose (1993) in the essay ascribes to the prevalence of neo-liberalism. It is not only a political philosophy but more an active system or technique with which to govern organisations or even nations.

Neoliberalism regulates through actual and not just theoretical interventions in the form of a quick growth in individual expertise for example instead of regulation through rules and direct control. Subsequently there is an emphasis on control. In other words accountability and the focus on benchmarks, teaching targets and learning results have become important in education. This focus on performativity in a neo-liberal society, as Ball (2003) would say, exists from an individual level to that of organisations. In later work Ball (2016b) has even argued that these principles are not only present in policies and economics but have been incorporated in the everyday perspective of how an individual looks at the world. Developing an individual through professionalisation is connected with learning, gaining knowledge and becoming an expert. The focus on learning as a society or community is part of becoming an expert and brings with it the focus on norms and reaching goals. Norms can be seen as a translation of a level of quality that society wants to achieve. In itself norms and reachable goals are recognisable elements that are used in combination with quality or even excellence (Barzun and Philipson, 1991; Biesta, 2006, 2017; Morley, 2003). These principles also become apparent when examining the notion excellence from the perspective of continuous improving of the individual and the organisation (see also 2.3.1 Excellence meaning continuous improving from page 9).

As already explained when focussing on excellence in relation to funding (see 2.3.3 Excellence meaning funding from page 14) Biesta, (2017, 2015), Dewey, (2004) and Morley (2003) argue there is more than measurable indicators that determine whether a high standard of education is attained or provided for. By focussing on measurable indicators and standardised norms the risk is that elements which are harder to measure because they are not all together clear but important for education are omitted. They may even be discarded as not being of value. This implicit knowledge according to Sennett (2009) and Vermeulen et al. (2014) is just as important for becoming an expert in one's field of practice.

On the basis of Biesta's (2017, 2015) theories about what education is for there is more than just the focus on learning: education should also be about education being emancipatory, democratic and virtuous and measuring the outcome(s) of education alone merely obscures the full picture.

Working towards standardised norms in education is something teachers have to do on a daily basis in the Netherlands. As individuals they are part of groups of teachers with their own set of goals to work towards. As an individual you have responsibilities to your own teaching but also to the group you are part of. This puts a lot in the hands of the individual. As standards nowadays stem from an individualistic neo-liberal perspective it is of interest to inquire into

individualism from a neo liberalistic perspective in relation to the educational domain. By doing so it might be possible to identify elements attributed to the teacher or education that might provide information on how to look for excellence.

Based on the work of Mudge (2008) about what neo-liberalism is but also what scholars like Ball (2009), Biesta (2015) and Lorenz (2012) the following elements belonging to an individual in a neo-liberalistic time can be identified.

Each individual is his or her own economic self. Individuals must cultivate their own personal value in the market. The individual is to be a businessperson of the self or as a famous American artist from the world of popular culture once said “I am not a business man, I am a business, man” (Tieleman, 2019). Within this, values such as wealth and happiness serve the entrepreneurial self and the process which comes with this.

Learning and education are not for the sake of learning and gaining knowledge but to become a more valuable product. Gaining knowledge is a way to add value to the individual self. The outcomes of learning and education needs to yield instant gratification, connect to career opportunities or pay the check. In other words intellectual education is only relevant when it is beneficial to one’s carer or economic success. Furthermore knowledge gained through professionalisation needs to lead to practical knowledge that can be marketed instead of conceptual knowledge that is difficult to market.

With this comes the idea that individuals find themselves in constant need to prove that they are working effectively and efficiently. In this striving for becoming better, benchmarks are important. Benchmarks leave no room for the specific and local as these variables will not fit in the standard that is set on what is agreed by the inspection of education, governments or management in schools. Benchmarks are becoming more important and with it audits and other forms of control to constantly prove that all is done effectively, efficiently and in the correct or right way.

Success of education is measured in outcomes lying well beyond the field of education. Information is gathered on school leavers’ success for example (Harris and Biesta, 2017). If school leavers are successful this is related to previous education which subsequently is deemed good. A school providing good schooling must therefore have good teachers and a school providing bad schooling has bad teachers. This leaves teachers as commodities to be used by school management in their striving for good schooling because teachers are important in the process of developing labour power in students.

Considering the paragraphs above it becomes clear that from the existing literature no clear meaning to the notion of excellence can be derived. It holds no meaning when used on its own. Excellence becomes loaded with meaning when used in relation to something else and when used within a specific context. Using the notion in relation to teacher professionalisation and continuous improvement of and by teachers it becomes clear that the notion holds elements that inform about the quality of teaching as used from a neo-liberalistic perspective and no longer from local sets of professional standards. It appears to shift from belonging to a professional context to a managerial or organisational context.

2.4 Finding a meaning of excellence: from literature to methodology

The literature review focusses heavily on what is already known on the meaning of excellence or what meaning already has been given to the notion. What is also clear so far is that no single meaning is given to it. What is clear is that when it comes to finding the meaning to the notion of excellence one has to look at the use of the notion. This use of the notion excellence can be found in the language used to talk about excellence. Beishuizen (2001) used student voices through interviews and free essay writing to capture language for example.

What language means is not easily explained. One can be talking about foreign languages, the language of politics, birds, music or love. It can be about written, spoken, sign or body language (Crystal, 2007; Fromkin et al., 2014). Scholars agree that language is a sign system used to communicate (Crystal, 2007; Fairclough, 1995; Fromkin et al., 2014; Gee, 1999; Paltridge, 2012).

With language connections are made. When looking at the use of language in more detail one could argue that language is used in contexts belonging to a group of individuals or professionals and where activities are practised. Gee (1999) contends that individuals or professionals within the context have a specific identity. From this identity relationships are formed that are aimed at sharing social goods (Gee, 1999). Goods in this manner can be thoughts, beliefs or meanings used in social areas, systems or situations.

When inquiring into areas, systems or situations where language is used to find meaning given to a moment, situation or system we enter the realm of discourse analyses. However to say that language is discourse is too easy. What is discourse is again not easily explained. No single meaning can be given to the word discourse. What discourse is or what one means when using the word discourse is different across the multifarious academic disciplines.

The meaning given to discourse depends on the academic discipline. Discourse is a term used across many fields as can be illustrated by looking at the website for the Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines conference in 2018 (CADAAD, n.d.). On the website multiple areas ranging from cognitive linguistics to sociology, forensics to discursive psychology are mentioned. From the perspective of academic disciplines the website states that there is no limitation to the fields of humanities, social and cognitive sciences.

With so many disciplines come so many meanings thus it is necessary to narrow the scope regarding inquiring into the meaning given to discourse. This literature review is part of a thesis on an inquiry into the meaning given to “Excellence” specifically by teachers in a vocational education and training college who are in a further professionalisation program. The significant context or setting is the further professionalisation program in which individuals participate and have the identity of teachers, assessors or managers in a college for vocational education and training. In this program they build relationships from which they distribute what they do and learn among themselves. They do so by using language, both spoken and written. This narrows the scope with which to look at what discourse means, bringing it within the field of linguistics and discourse analyses.

From a linguistic perspective discourse is strongly related to the way in which words are combined into sentences and how combined sentences are formed. Furthermore it is about how these sentences then relate to each other and as such create meaning (Crystal, 2007; Fromkin et al., 2014; Gee, 1999). Based on this, discourse can be explained as language in use. From this perspective discourse is not just looked at as an abstract system of grammar and words but as an actual utterance of sentences in a specific context, a context of sending and receiving where there is speaking and listening or writing and reading.

In the two above presented meanings given to discourse the difference lies in the fact that the first focusses on the construction of sentences and what meaning is given through the forming of sentences and the structure of a group of sentences. The other meaning focusses on the dimension of context in which there is a sender and a recipient, namely a writer and reader or speaker and listener. In recent years additional attention has been paid to time, place and moment of when discourse formed (Rogers et al., 2016). In other words discourse from this point of view can be described as texts produced with an audience in mind and belonging to a specific place and time.

It is worth mentioning that according to some scholars (Gee, 1999; Paltridge, 2012) there is a distinction in how the notion discourse is used depending on the academic culture belonging to a German and Central European context or that of the English speaking world. The German and Central European context make a distinction between text and discourse based on their linguistic tradition while in the English speaking world discourse is most often used for both written and spoken texts. In this literature review the line of the English speaking world is followed.

Studies by scholars have identified a number of aspects which together form discourse. In these studies there is an interest in characteristics of naturally occurring language that is used by actual language users. The focus in these research fields is broader than on isolated words and sentences and in addition non-verbal aspects of communication are taken into account. There is also a focus on interaction and the function of the contexts in which language is used. Finally linguistic analyses of phenomena of grammar and language use are dealt with (Paltridge, 2012; Rogers et al., 2016; Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

This bonding of elements with language in use as a part of social life is clearly what Fairclough (2004, 1995) refers to as discourse. He argues that discourse represents such elements as relations and structures of the material world in connection to the mental world of feelings and beliefs that connected to the social world. This according to Fairclough (2004) and Lazaroiu (2013) suggests that discourse is used to point at different means of bringing structure to areas of knowledge and social practice. Furthermore discourse grows over time in relation to the context or setting in which it is used (Howarth, 2002; Lazaroiu, 2013; White, 2009).

This historical approach to discourse is also used by Derrida (1998; Derrida and Ewald, 1995) to provide meaning to the notion. Discourse is considered as knowledge and the memory of social practice set in time. Text refers to concrete written documents and oral sayings and records of these set in time.

When giving meaning to the notion discourse Gee (2015, 1999) situates the use of language again within the domains of what is said and done. One uses language that is part of one's role and one acts accordingly. Discourse and its meaning is both shaped by the world as well as shaping the world. It is socially constructed as well as socially conditioned. It brings together situations, knowledge, social identities and relationships of people and groups of people (Gee, 1999; Paltridge, 2012; Rogers et al., 2016; Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

The context of this case study is where groups of people are brought together in situations. Teachers and management as well as knowledge in the form of lectures and course material come together in a professionalisation program. In this context the actors make use of language to learn, reflect and develop. Together they shape what happens in the professionalisation program and what the outcomes will be. Language is used by the different actors in the program that will reflect the role they have and thoughts and ideas they have with the theme of the professionalisation program. In view of this one may suppose that a research approach taking discourse from the context as the main data corpus to explore is a fruitful line of inquiry. The next chapter will explore what methodological approach is best suited for this research project.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The literature chapter explored the notion of excellence and why it can provoke controversy, and finally what discourses are connected to its usage in policy texts, what meanings are given to it by practitioners.

From this last element the next step is to decide on an appropriate research methodology or approach to further investigate the main and sub research questions on what meaning is given to the notion excellence in a specific social and professional context in which this notion is used. Before deciding on an appropriate approach attention is paid to the ontological and epistemological beliefs that shape the research.

Therefore, this chapter starts with locating the researcher in his field. Ethics and politics of the research project will be examined and the researcher's beliefs on constructing knowledge, learning and nature of reality will be presented. After this methods and approaches are explored and related to the data which is to be collected and analysed. These strategies of inquiry are explored with a focus on the research question as presented in chapter one. Ways of analysing are considered and decided on. This will lead to a worked-out research plan.

A research question relating to an educational context locates the research within the field of social research. Research within this field can be conducted from a great many different perspectives (Bryman, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Denzin and Ryan, 2007; Grbich, 2004).

Deciding on what perspective to use is a process formed by looking through a lens which brings what the researcher deems to be 'reality' into focus. When a researcher perceives reality as all that is happening in front of him or her research will be conducted in a different manner to research conducted by a researcher who believes that reality can also be anything beyond the researcher's view, or even by someone else. Furthermore, it is essential to know whether reality is something singular or plural and if there are such states as multiple realities whether these can exist simultaneously and parallel to each other. Another element to consider is how reality is perceived by authors in the field the research is conducted in.

The research project presented in this thesis belongs to the field of education. However, much can be said about whether education is a field. Some scholars such as Blackmore (2010) argue that education is a practice and when researched it is a specific practice in the research of several fields of practice. In the remainder of this chapter field of education will be used because it provides an image of a broad playing field with multiple actors but all belonging to a

context. This ties in with the professional context of teachers of a VET college participating in a professionalisation program focused on in this research project.

So, through presenting certain beliefs which the researcher holds regarding the nature of reality, it becomes possible to locate research and researcher in its field. This is also called describing a research or researcher's ontology (Bryman, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2017).

Having knowledge of a researcher's ontology and relating this to the research field and research questions posed is necessary to understand why a research methodology is deemed appropriate. In this section, the researcher's beliefs and views are therefore presented. The first-person narrative is to be used in this chapter as it is about the researcher's views and it comes across as more authentic. While debates about using first person narrative or not in a research paper are ongoing, it is commonly accepted to use first person narrative when the writing is about the researcher and not related to objectivity (Graff and Birkenstein, 2016; Kirkman, 2005).

3.2 Positioning the researcher

Born in 1972 in the city of Tilburg in the Netherlands as the oldest of two sons of a father and mother I enjoyed a peaceful childhood. My father worked in education as a headmaster of a special secondary school and my mother worked nightshifts as a nurse. After attending primary and secondary school I went to a University for Applied Sciences and graduated as an English language teacher.

After graduating I started working as a teacher in a secondary vocational school. After 10 years teaching and following courses I started with a postgraduate course at Roehampton University. After gaining my MA I made use of the learned research skills to improve my teaching. This led to the start of the current postgraduate course of which this is my Doctoral thesis.

In the role of teacher, I learned that to reach learning goals with the pupils in school you must work together as teachers. Providing a sound and welcoming learning environment requires that teachers work together in providing a safe and predictable learning environment.

A lot can be taken from academic texts and written experiences by others, including those which explain in what way teaching theories are applied in teaching practice. But it is the local situation which hones and makes theoretical teaching methods and practices "work". At the same time teachers need to speak and work with each other to learn to understand each other's teaching language and beliefs. Teaching practices taught me that in a situation where people do not work together closely arrangements and rules made are very often made

virtually, meaning that individuals say yes to or adhere to rules made but in practice act differently.

During my initial teacher training, research only came into focus at the end of the four-year program. It was during my first postgraduate course that research became an integral part of looking at my professional world. The MA programme focused on improving one's own practice and incorporated research methods that go with that. Highlighted was action research and participatory action research in which reflection took an integral part. Growing up in a family where both parents work within the social domain meant my path of further learning has formed me both as a person and as a professional. This is of influence on my role as researcher as well and I must take this into account when looking at where I stand as a researcher. This is also known as positionality.

Positionality stems from the idea that where we are in the social structure and which institution we are in have effects on how we understand the world (Hankins and Yarbrough, 2009). All these effects make it hard to truly distance oneself and as a researcher take an true objective stance. One could argue that positionality is the slider on a scale between an objective or a more subjective stance taken within a research; from completely disattached and without underlying assumptions to being part of the research context and filled with underlying assumptions. By articulating this space in relation to the research it becomes clear in what way the researcher is positioned in relation to its research. Others (Hamdan, 2009; Mercer, 2007) speak of being in insider, outsider or even an outsider/insider researcher. This positionality is not a fixed state but more of a flexible one. In different situations and at various times a researcher researching his or her own practice is both at different moments in the research process in different ways.

In relation to my research project I can position myself as an insider/outsider researcher. With this comes a wide range of pitfalls to consider. From a positivist, traditional methodological perspective for example being an insider researcher comes with problems in relation to validity. From this positivist perspective validity refers to the ability to accurately represent reality and this can be facilitated by using methods in which a hypothesis is tested in different situations.

From a discourse analytic perspective on the other hand, validity is about research which unravels taken for granted narratives and discourse by making use of methodologies which perceive realities in different ways (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017).

My professional practice and academic education inform me that I believe that learning and knowledge of the educational field develops and is formed in processes of social interaction.

The educational field thus being an area in which academic and socially constructed knowledge is applied for a specific purpose; that of education. What happens in this educational field can be defined as the reality in which I as a researcher operate. This automatically means that what is learned in one context or seems to work in one context or even is believed to be the true working in one practice is not the exactly the same in another context. Therefore, there is not one truth there are multiple truths.

Where in the capacity as a researcher can I place myself best? The following best describes this: I take a critical stance towards taken- for- granted understanding and knowledge. I believe that knowledge of the world is culturally as well as historically specific. I believe that knowledge is created, kept and continuously developed through social processes; I believe that both what one knows and how one acts is closely related and that the one informs the other. As such, as a researcher, I can place myself within the domain of what Denzin and Lincoln (2017) and Hepburn (2006) term social constructionism. What is clear is that when a researcher positions oneself as indicated appropriate research methods or approaches which inquire a specific system or field will make use of methods belonging to what is commonly recognised as qualitative methodologies.

The beliefs and stance are not formed overnight. After my initial teacher training I have always looked for further educational opportunities from an always present wish to better understand my professional practice and a will to get what was commonly called “better” in my teaching career. The combination of further education and applying the knowledge gained into practice has formed my beliefs as stated above. To explain this further I present the reader with three examples from my professional practice/career.

Gaining a teaching degree brought me into a teaching practice of a secondary vocational special school. In college I had learned which teaching methods would be best used for learning words in a foreign language. During my first year’s teaching English to first and second year pupils it became clear to me these learned methods were completely unsuitable for many of my pupils. Many pupils had great difficulties in learning their idiom by means of the lists of words based on a topic and the words presented in a sentence to provide the necessary context. My practice taught me that many of my pupils were getting better results when they were asked to learn their idiom by listening to the words pronounced and the translation given verbally as well while simultaneously looking at a picture representing the word. This experience made me question all I had learned during my initial teacher training and resulted initially in taking postgraduate courses and in the end doing an MA, starting my EdD and

leaving me still looking at my professional practice with many questions about how things work or not.

Believing how things work in the world of education is for me dominantly informed by a western, predominantly white Christian culture and history. This is different from a colleague teacher who grew up in an African or even American country. On a smaller note I can remember the moment I was in conversation with an English colleague about pedagogy and it became clear that the meaning given to this word which is different in Dutch as in English even though the same word in spelling is used. I later learned that the difference came from originating from an Anglo or middle European educational culture.

As a Dutch practitioner in education I did an MA at an English University. Part of the taught elements in the MA was the focus on gaining knowledge and learning through research within one's own practice and in collaboration with others. My MA thesis focussed on what exercises for pupils with ADHD needed to have in order to provide the most suitable exercise opportunities for these pupils. The learning outcomes of this research project provided the basis for collegial discussion on exercises used within one another's classes. These provide the impetus for groups of teachers in the same subject to come together and look at the exercises used within their classes in the light of the finding from my research report. Through airing thoughts in the open they were able to give form to their knowledge and start to consider whether certain constructs others used were suitable for their own experiences. This social process of participating in what are called communities of practice and communities of learning (Senge, 2010; Senge et al., 2012; Wenger, 1998) has firmly developed my belief that knowledge is created, kept and continuously developed through processes where individuals work, learn and develop together.

Acknowledging that the field of qualitative research is on the move in all possible directions Denzin and Lincoln (2017) provide support for a researcher to locate oneself within the field. They explain that not only can methods belonging to several research fields be used but interpretive methods from the schools of critical theory for example can now be used as well.

When positioning research or a researcher one enters a complex context also known as research paradigms (Alexander, 2006; Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Hammersley, 2012). It was Kuhn (1970) who indicated this system of research design can be thought of as models that provide a frame of mind within a scientific field. This framework provides perceptions on reality and is a base from which research methods emerge.

Making use of the findings presented above it must be possible to plot myself as a researcher in a matrix on research paradigms where the focus is on ontology as presented by (Denzin and

Lincoln, 2017). Working from Denzin and Lincoln's (2017) matrix on "basic beliefs of alternative inquiry paradigms" as a researcher I am best placed in the constructivism box with elements taken from the critical theory box as presented in the following table.

Table 3.1 adapted from Denzin and Lincoln (2017:111)

Issue	Positivism	Post positivism	Critical Theory	Constructivism (Interpretivism)	Participatory (e.g. Action Research)
Ontology	Belief in a single identifiable reality	Belief in a single reality but to fully understand might be difficult due to variables	World is based on issues of unbalance in power in this world human nature has its place	Realities exist in multiple mental constructions based on and in a specific context	Reality is whatever happens in co-creation between subject en object.

As the research presented in this thesis is within a social setting and aimed at inquiring after the meaning given to a notion by people, constructionism as a concept will be used and the research will be named constructionist to coincide with what is written about constructionist research. The researcher's ontology combined with the research questions and context is best approached by making a pragmatic use of the social constructionistic paradigm. Using a social constructionist approach provides a way of looking at the world through a lens that will work for the research questions.

3.3 The appropriate research methodology

When as a researcher one establishes what views are held in relation to perceiving reality, next is to consider what knowledge there is in the perceived reality. In what manner this knowledge is constructed and what method is needed to extract this knowledge is also known as describing the epistemology of research as can be learned from Bryman (2004) and Denzin and Lincoln (2017).

Having established to fit in with the paradigm articulated as constructivism or interpretivism (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017) next is to find out what views on knowledge belong to this paradigm. At the base of knowledge are the constructed meanings of people who participate within a common context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). Knowledge according to constructionists is not constructed by the mind but created between social actors (Hepburn, 2006). On this basis it can be argued that building knowledge is something which happens in interaction. Furthermore creating is an interactive process between the creator and something else. Constructionists try to understand the world through the lens of those who are situated in the world in a specific context (Coulson, 2006; Gergen and Gergen, 2007; Hepburn, 2006; Huebner, 2012). Drawing on this explanation one can assume that context is an important element in relation to knowledge construction. Knowing what is real is confined to a certain context.

Having placed the way knowledge is viewed when related to the constructionist or interpretive ontology it is possible to expand the matrix presented earlier. An extra box needs to be added for this purpose under the already existing box on ontology. This new box entitled epistemology presents how knowing or knowledge is looked upon.

Table 3.2 based on Denzin and Lincoln (2017:111)

Issue	Constructivism (Interpretivism)
Ontology	Realities exist in multiple mental constructions based on and in a specific context
Epistemology	The constructed meanings of actors are the foundation of knowledge. Knowledge is co-created.

Within the constructionist or interpretive paradigm context is of great importance. Presenting more clarity to this concept will help defining the research context later on. Stalnaker (2014:13) presents theoretical representations of context: one as “a concrete representation at a point in time at which a discourse is taking place”; the other is a “notion of context as

common ground: a body of information that is presumed to be shared by participants in a discourse”.

This second theoretical presentation of context comes nearest to the context under inquiry after the meaning given to the notion of excellence. The next section focuses on the context of the research project. Context also comes in the form of an entity or setting as can be learned from Keller (2013)

Through the review it becomes clear that when inquiring or researching what meaning is given to words a direct link can be made to ways of analysing discourse. This becomes most apparent when it becomes clear that it is when language is used that meaning is given to language (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000; Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Gee, 1999; Keller, 2013; Paltridge, 2012).

To find out what meaning is given to the notion excellence by teachers in a further development programme in a VET college in the Netherlands it is therefore important to find out where, when and how language around excellence is used.

With the scope defined as above next a decision needs to be made to find the best fitting research approach to answering the main question. In the research question, there is focus on the inquiry into meaning given to a notion.

The research question provides scope for the research project as well. It pulls the research project within the field of education and the realm of further teacher development. Relating this with the ways in which meaning is given to a notion one must think about where this notion of giving meaning would become apparent.

Inquiring what meaning is given to a notion used within a specific educational setting draws the research into alignment with certain approaches. The research context is set by the scope present in the research question. Having established that the context or setting of this research project is a professionalisation program for further development in a Dutch VET college, it is a context that is quite specific. One could even argue it can be defined as a single case as Bassey (1999) and Yin (2013) use it. When conducting a case study it is not only important to have means to approach enough relevant data (Yin, 2013) but also to make appropriate choices in research techniques used to analyse the data.

With the research question in hand and the scope of the researched domain defined the most appropriate research methodology seems to be case study. Just stating case study as the appropriate research methodology leaves it too broadly described. To bring in more focus it is

best to return to the fact that the research is an inquiry into meaning given to a notion and secondly it is within a defined context.

Context, when defined as an entity which contains a physical setting in which communication takes place, is an important term also used in relation to discourse analyses or discourse research (Gee, 1999; Keller, 2013). It considers the use of a notion in the direct context of where the notion is used. The context of the professionalisation program de Excellente Docent consist out of multiple units in a single case. The units can again be seen as contexts in which discourse exists and belong together. The singularity is there only because the setting in which the program is formed is a specific defined group of people within the same organisation.

Units that can be identified within the program range from a number of policy documents that can be identified as belonging together in the preparatory phase of the program. This relates to: records and summaries of meetings by the taskforce belonging to the program; work by participants in the programme which is compulsory; blogs by participants and can be considered to be freely occurring work by participants and possibly more. These units are sub-contexts under the main context of the single case. Binding it all together is the group of people using language in the different units and in relation to the program.

On the basis of the above one could argue that the appropriate research methodology is single case study with multiple units employing a discourse analytic approach. In the next unit, the focus is on the means of inquiry when adopting a discourse analytic approach.

3.4 Strategies of inquiry

While not going deeply into the debate on the differences and or similarities between research methodologies, methods and approaches it is important to mention that these debates take place to place a research study in context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Hammersley, 2012).

Having placed my research project within a specific context in the previous section it is now appropriate to focus on the strategies of inquiry related to doing a case study with an approach deriving from discourse analysis.

In the field of education not only are case studies used but Keller (2013) identifies a boom in the use of discourse orientated theories and research in the social sciences. Within the social sciences and therefore education research of discourse concerns the relationships between speaking and writing as social activities and the building of meaning in social groups (Gee, 1999; Keller, 2013; Paltridge, 2012).

The use of discourse analyses comes into focus when research questions and theoretical perspectives relate to the construction of the world and ways to produce meaning. Discourse

may be understood according to Keller (2013) as an attempt to bring stability to the use of language and giving meaning to language used in a specific context. By doing so it provides more knowledge about a specific context.

Discourse analysis does not refer to a specific research method. It points at a research perspective in relation to specific research objects which are known as discourses (Gee, 1999; Keller, 2013; Paltridge, 2012). The concept of discourse is a rather complex one as is already pointed out in the literature review chapter (see 2.4 Finding a meaning of excellence: from literature to methodology, from page 30). Essentially, one could support the view that discourse analyses are about language in use, in specific social contexts.

However, discourse analyses come in many forms. A broad distinction can be made by identifying discourse analysts that focus on detailed analyses of texts from a textual perspective. On the other hand, there are analysts who work from a non-linguistic perspective (Fairclough 2003). On this end of the discourse analyses scale the focus is more on the distribution of goods such as freedom or access to education for example and in what way this shows through discourse (Gee 1999).

Discourse analysis is often used by social scientists to research social change. When the aim of their research is to find continuity and change at an abstract and structural level it is often called critical discourse analyses according to Fairclough (2003). Gee (1999) debates the distinction between discourse analyses and critical discourse analyses, concluding that when the aim is to describe the workings of language in use it can be called discourse analyses. However, when the analyses of discourse are aimed at defining whose interests are represented, helped or impaired and in what way goods are distributed in social settings it is often called critical discourse analyses (Gee (1999).

How to research language in use through discourse analyses involves not a single technique (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1999; Paltridge, 2012). It depends on whatever focus the research questions holds. When one is trying to find meaning by looking at language practiced in a social context related to a specific phenomenon any different approaches can be used. Whatever one uses in doing discourse analyses depends on generating a sufficient amount of data to analyse.

As this specific research project into the meaning of a notion in a specific setting looks at the different ways in which language is used and starts with a detailed analysis of texts, the appropriate term for the research method used would be discourse analysis in line with Gee's (1999) notion.

In the following section, the ways of collecting and analysing data in relation to the research are presented.

3.5 Methods of collecting and analysing

The information described in the previous section makes it arguable that one could establish the picture that the data in relation to this research project will consist of material portrayed as discourse. This Discourse comprises forms of written and spoken words by participants within the social setting belonging to the scope set by the research question.

Before doing discourse analyses to find out what meaning is given to excellence within the context described earlier it is important to identify the forms in which the needed data exist. Rapley (2007) speaks not of data collection but about generating a research archive. Within the research archive two categories of material exist: material generated by the researcher and material which already exists. He uses the term generating a research archive for the fact that these sources of data or material when collecting lead to more material. All material together forms a data set which is then analysed.

When thinking about the context in which the case study is conducted the research archive can be filled with many different materials. The teachers participating in the further professionalisation program generate material in which they use language. As an insider researcher, I have the benefit of knowing the context and knowing what material is already present. At the same time it is important to use data in such a way that it is disattached from the researcher as much as possible. This does not mean the data needs to be untainted by any researcher's actions as Rapley argues(2007). It is about getting distance between the data and the researcher.

Because of the above the base of the research archive will consist of the following materials.

Table 3.3

Already Existing	<p>Policy documents on excellence and teacher professionalisation from within the organisation.</p> <p>Policy documents on excellence and teacher professionalisation from outside the organisation but related to the internal documents.</p> <p>End work by the participants in the program in the form of portfolios.</p> <p>Written work in other forms from the participants in the program e.g. Blogs.</p>
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Researcher generated data but untainted by researcher actions	Audio recordings of group session between members of the taskforce and participants in the program on evaluating the program and discussing the learning outcomes.
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No interviews or material from focus groups are going to be used because they are deemed to be too subject to interference from the researcher's attendance. Furthermore, one could find a problem in the use of material from interviews and or focus groups based data: this type of material data is generated in which a participant self-reports or gives an account of what they have done. For discourse analysis it is not reflective material that is looked for but material used in a context for a specific situation and from this material trying to induce knowledge (Paltridge, 2012; Rapley, 2007).

Before the data set can be analysed it is necessary to transfer the audio recording to written text. As the researcher will not be present when making the recordings to keep the material as untainted as possible there are no field notes to accompany the transcribed recording. To make sure that the transcribed recordings are as complete a textual representation of spoken language as possible one might turn to the way of transcribing the recordings known as a Jeffersonian transcription (Rapley, 2007; Wooffitt, 2005).

Jeffersonian transcript is used by conversation analyses or discursive psychology and makes use of a set of markers to display all nuances that come forward in the audio recordings. It goes further than transcribing what is said and displays the paralinguistic features of talk such as sounds and utterances. In Jeffersonian transcripts silences and different durations of silent parts are transcribed as well. This is to provide a rich as possible translation of a recording that is more than a partial and selective textual representation of a real-world occurrence.

As a complement to this it is possible to ask a participant present during the situation which is recorded to provide detailed notes of the moment. However the risk of doing so is that the participant is too clearly aware of their moment being part of a research. Thus the influence of the researcher is there in this case by proxy.

In relation to the data already in existence it is important to make detailed notes of where the documents come from and in what form they come. This to provide as much information as possible to locate the documents in the context.

When all research material in the research archive is present the process of analysing the data starts. NVIVO is used to assist in the analysis of all data gathered in the data archive. Each data source in a unit is given a classification. Classifications say something about the data source, for example, a blog, email, portfolio or meeting transcript. Next attributions are given to the sources. An attribution can be staff member or head of school or participant. Finally, what NVIVO calls a case is awarded to each data source. Since this might be confusing in relation to this research project being a case study, container is used here instead. A container can be people or year or document. These labels are needed before analysing and coding in NVIVO can take place. The labels are needed when after a sorting phase comparisons or queries are executed on the data. For this different techniques can be used. In the next section this will be explored in more detail.

Before the actual collection of data can begin ethical guidelines are to be followed according to the guidelines set by the University of Hull. A meeting was organised to inform the participants of the programme of the purpose of the research. In addition a letter was handed out again explaining the purpose of the research and in what way data would be handled. Each participant was given a consent form and asked to return this within a time set. The head management of the organisation the VET college is part of was informed during a separate informative meeting on the purpose of the research and an explanatory letter and consent form were handed over to ask permission to undertake the research within the organisation. After all signed consent forms were returned the ethics application was completed and after ethics approval was granted (see 8.7 Ethics approval on page IX) the data collection commenced.

3.6 Analyses

This study into the meaning given to excellence within a professionalisation program called de Excellente Docent is defined as a single case study as explained in the previous units. Within this single case study there are several units from which the data is gathered. A number of scholars from the field of discourse analyses (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Leitch and Palmer, 2010) call this a data archive. The data archive consisting of discourse from the different units which make up the case study needs to be analysed.

In this section the focus is on the way the analysis is undertaken. First the scope of the case is illustrated and the different units within the case are identified. Next the data sources from each unit are described. After this the different rounds of analysing are presented and explained.

As scholars like Gee (1999) and Fairclough (2003) tell us analysing discourse is not done in a structured manner or simply by following a recipe. It needs a researcher to go back and forth through the data following a recursive or iterative process until the moment that nothing new or interesting can be found.

For this research the first thing to identify is the scope of the case in this case study. The scope of the case study encircles everything that belongs to a Teacher Professionalisation Program called the Excellente Docent. As illustrated in an earlier chapter this is found within a Dutch college for Vocational Education and Training. When homing in on the case, five of units are identified from which data presenting discourse in mainly written form can be harvested. In order to make analyses more structured the units will be identified by allocating a letter from the alphabet to them. This results in the following units.

Unit A is a unit where mainly discourse is found related to the “why” of the professionalisation program. It will be occupied with isolating parts of policy texts for content in relation to why a professionalisation program around teacher excellence is needed.

Unit B mainly holds discourse related to the “how” of the professionalisation program. Parts of HR documents in relation to the organisational elements of the professionalisation program, transcripts of meetings, promotional documents and material in the form of mailings and information on the intranet will be isolated as content to identify in what forms excellence is operationalised.

Unit C is where compulsory work by participants in the professionalisation program is found. Here one should think of portfolios and reflective work by participants. It is the result of tasks set within the professionalisation program. These tasks relate to how the programme is designed. The compulsory work is therefore important. It is the result of how the participants go about the tasks set in the program.

Unit D is freely occurring work by participants or former participants. Content from this unit is looked at separately from unit C. The idea behind this decision is that by separating these units it will become possible to make comparisons or perform queries in a later stage of analysing the data.

Unit E is a transcript of an audio recording of naturally occurring discourse. The audio recording captured the moment participants in the program had their final assessment conversation with individuals from the steering group in the program.

From this the following data archive matrix can be made to provide a better overview of data sources harvested from each unit in the case study.

Table 3.4

	Unit A	Unit B	Unit C	Unit D	Unit E
1	National policies	HR organisational documents on the program	Portfolios	Blogs	Transcript of audio recording of naturally occurring discourse
2	Organisational Policies	Transcripts of meetings	Reflective papers	Articles on intranet	
3		Promotional material in the form of documents, mailings		In the picture article	

With an overview of data available in the data archive ((Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Leitch and Palmer, 2010) analysis can begin. As there is no set way of analysing from a discourse analytic perspective the researcher keeps coming back to data until nothing new or interesting in relation to the research question is found. If for example after going to the sorting phase of performing a word count on the basis of a search word, words derived from that and synonyms and no new content turns up one might decide that this is a moment to stop as nothing new and therefore interesting for the research is found.

The study of a number of scholars on discourse analysis like Denzin and Lincoln, (2017); Fairclough, (2003); Gee, (1999) and Paltridge, (2012) provided the insight that the following approach is one to take.

All data sources will be analysed in a number of rounds. In general, the first rounds will be mainly aimed at sorting the data and identifying useful parts in relation to answering the research questions. It is also used to get distance between the researcher and the data. As described earlier in this methodology chapter being an insider/outsider researcher brings with it a number of complications. Getting distance between the researcher and the data is therefore important. By alienating oneself from the data not only a situation of looking

differently at the data is created (Welsh, 2002) but distance between the researcher and the data grows.

The first rounds of analysing will be in relation to the individual data sources. When nothing new emerges from these rounds the data sources are analysed in relation to each other. To provide a more detailed insight in the rounds of analysing each round will be now be introduced.

3.7 Round one

Round one is to get a feeling of what the data might possess. For this all data is uploaded in NVIVO (Welsh, 2002). The rationale for using NVIVO is explained in a previous unit. The following actions or tools are used over a number of iterations of data in this first round of analysing.

From each data source a file is made explaining as much as possible about the data source. This will explain when possible the original goal of the data source who the author is or authors are and what audience the source aimed at, the number of words, genre and structure of the source.

This file is made in order to be able to determine how important the data source is. One wants to know whether the data source is the product of a single person or carries a possible meaning held of a whole organisation.

A number of convenient tools are used for an initial analysis to get a feel for the data. A word cloud is made from each data base using the word cloud tool in NVIVO. For this a number of words are excluded. The words excluded were selected on the understanding that when used on their own they hold no meaning. Based on this the following exemption list was made.

Table 3.5

	Dutch	English
Auxiliaries of tenses	Zijn Hebben Zullen Willen	To be To have Shall/should will/would
Definite and indefinite articles	De	The

	Het een	A an
Cardinals	Een (1) Twee (2) Drie (3) etc	One Two Three etc
Both simple and compound nouns	Ik Jij Hij Zij Het Wij Jullie Zij Mij Jouw Hem Haar Het Onze Jullie Hun Ikzelf Jijzelf Hijzelf Zijzelf	I You He She It We You They Me You Him Her It Us You Them Myself Yourself Himself Herself

	zichzelf Onszelf Julliezelf zichzelf	Itself Ourselves Yourselves Themselves
Demonstrative pronouns	Dit Dat Deze Die	This That These Those
Interrogative pronouns	Wie Wat/welke wat/welke	Who What Which
Indefinite pronouns	Al/alle(n)/allemaal Alles Elk(e)/ieder(e)	All/every Everything/all/anything Each/either/every/any
	men	one
Utterances in transcription only	Eeeuh M m m m Okay eeuhm	Eeeuh M m m m Okay eeuhm

After the word cloud the next analysing tool used is what Gee (1999) calls the intonation tool or tool #5 from his toolbox. This means that each data source with the exemption of the

transcription is read out loud to listen for intonation and when this happens the text will be marked in the following mark xxxx (code used for intonation in Jeffersonians transcription). When in later analysing rounds, interesting findings are made in an area where intonation is heard while reading it out loud and thus signal that something more might be learned.

The audio recording of the moment of natural occurring discourse demands extra attention. It needs to be transformed into a written transcription. This is done by the researcher using a simple programme (Transcribe). It works locally on a computer and saves data only on this computer. The software provides the transcriber with the possibility to stop the playback of the recording and when started again it restarts a fraction of a second earlier to where the recording was stopped so nothing is missed. Playback speed can be adjusted to keep up with transcribing

Initially a transcription of the audio recording is made in which only the spoken words are transformed into written words. This does not provide a richer transcription in which pauses in speech and intonation are also made visual in the transcription when using codes as developed by Jefferson (2004).

In a next round after sorting the data interesting passages in the transcription will be listened to again and if needed transcribed along the line of Jeffersonian's transcription (2004) to provide more insight into the speech elements present in the recorded passage. This will make it easier to compare data sources in a later round of analysing.

3.8 Round two

Round two is also part of the sorting stage of the analyses and focusses on the place the data sources have within the context they are from. As explicated earlier having an in-depth understanding of the context is important when doing discourse analyses. As this research is undertaken by a researcher who is insider-outsider is important to objectify this round to again create as much distance between the research and the context but at the same time provide enough objective information the context. A context as explained in 3.3 is also an area in which or from which the content that end up as data sources is generated. For this two activities or tools are employed.

Aspects of the context are explored to find whether there is a relation with the information provided by the data. This is undertaken by making use of the fill in, the making strange and the subject tool as introduced by Gee (2014). In this round the data sources are investigated further through the lens of genre analyses. For each data source the researcher determines what the disembedded and situated genre is. This is done to find out what the nature of

described activities in the data source is and whether it is strategic or purpose driven. The analytic importance in identifying the difference lies with the aspect of comparing data and running queries at a later analytic round. Findings from round two are included in the data files which accompany each data source. To clarify what context can be identified and whether these are strategic or purpose driven an earlier matrix is used next.

Table 3.6

	Unit A	Unit B	Unit C	Unit D	Unit E
1	National policies	HR organisational documents on the program	Portfolios	Blogs	Transcript of audio recording of naturally occurring discourse
2	Organisational Policies	Transcripts of meetings	Reflective papers	Articles on intranet	
3		Promotional material in the form of documents, mailings		In the picture article	
	National and Organisational context.	Departmental context within the organisation	Context of the professionalisation program	Online context	Specific planned context
	Strategic driven	Strategic driven	Purpose driven	Purpose drive	Purpose driven

3.9 Round three

This round is the last round in the sorting stage of analysing the gathered discourse present in the data archive. In this round three all data sources will be looked at by making use of content analysis in the form of an initial wordcount based on a number of search words.

Next to the Dutch word for excellence and all other forms in which it is used synonyms for excellence will be used. Also, a number of different search words is constructed on the results of what has been found in the literature review. In the next matrix the initial set of search words is presented.

Table 3.7

Dutch search word used	English translation
Excel (excellent, excellente, excelleren)	Excel (excellent, to excel)
Beste	The best
Best	best
Beter	better
Eerste	First
Kwaliteit	Quality
Inzet	Merit
Talent	Talent
Hard werken	Work hard
Inspirerend	Inspiring

After the initial word count the parts in the discourse that come up are marked to inquire into at another stage. Each individual data source receives this treatment more than once in order not to miss informal things. If during this process new search words come up as a result of the content analyses these will be used to do new wordcounts. This is maintained in iterations as long as is necessary until nothing new is found.

3.10 Round four

Round four is the round bridging the content analytical approach of the data with a discourse analytical approach. The first three rounds have been necessary to sort and filter the data corpus. Round four will look at a selection of the data corpus with more in-depth discourse analytical tools to find possible answers to the research questions. In other words in this round the findings of the previous three rounds are combined and compared. Each code word is looked up across the units A to E and the section it relates to taken out of the data source and placed in a separate word file.

Each section is then analysed by using the situated meaning tool, the social language tool, the intertextuality tool, the figured world tool. By applying these tools to the discourse a clearer picture emerges of the information that is held within the discourse. James Paul Gee presents the researcher with six theoretical language tools that can be applied when conducting discourse analyses (Gee, 2014) to connect language to the world and culture. This connection is needed in the case study inquiring into the meaning given to excellence since it ties language to the world of the case. The tools are known by a name and number and are presented in more detail here.

Tool #23 The situated meaning tool

What specific meanings are attributed to three words given the context and how the context is constructed.

This tool relates to the general meaning or utterance type meaning and specific meaning or utterance token meaning, this being the meaning of words in different contexts in which they are used and in different specialist domains that recruit them.

Tool #24 The social language tool

With the social language tool a researcher can ask how words and grammatical structures are used to signal and enact a given social language. To understand a writer, one needs to know who is writing. Social language or register are styles or varieties of a language or a mixture of languages that enact and are associated with a particular social identity.

Tool # 25 The intertextuality tool

This tool asks how words and grammatical structure are used to quote, refer to or allude to other "texts". Texts according to Gee (2014) are what others have said or written or other styles of language for example social language.

Tool #26 The figured world tool

With the figured world tool a discourse analyst can ask what typical stories or figured worlds the words and phrases are assuming and inviting listeners to assume. What participants, activities, ways of interacting, forms of language, people, objects, environments and institutions as well as values are in these figured worlds? For example a picture of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical or normal. What is taken as typical or normal varies by context and by people's social and cultural group.

Tool #27 The big D discourse

The Big D discourse tool asks what discourse this language part is of, that is, what kind of person is this speaker or writer seeking to enact or get recognised; what sort of actions, interactions, values, beliefs, and objects, tools, technologies and environments are associated with this sort of language within a particular discourse. Discourse for Gee is the social group with which one shares conventions about how to use and interpret language. He makes a distinction between primary discourse as the learned, culturally distinctive ways of being an everyday person as a member of our family or community and secondary language as all discourses acquired later in life within institutions that are part of wider communities whether these be religious groups, community organisations, schools, businesses or governments.

Tool #28 The big C conversation tool

This tool asks what issues, sides, debates and claims the communication assumes of those who hear. It asks whether assumptions are made about what a reader knows and what issues, sides, debates need to be understood to know what the communicator is communicating. Can the communication be carrying out a historical or widely known debate or discussion between or among discourses? Conversation for Gee is the public debate in which everybody brings with them knowledge about public issues and their sides. In an ever-present background people bring in their interpretation of what they hear and read or in terms of which you can derive from their own talk and writing. Conversation for Gee are the topics, issues, sides and debates that have become widely known in society at large or among large groups of people as they have enacted their discourses through history in texts, talk and media.

These six theoretical tools are selected on the basis of their usefulness to conduct the discourse analytical approach to the main sources for the data corpus. They help to tie in the discourse with the world of the cases the study focuses on to bring to light the meaning that is given to excellence. In the practical activity of analysing each tool is typed onto a flash card

and the cards are used when delving into the data. Each card is held up and an attempt is made to interpret the coded area in the source. The findings are then noted as an annotation to the coded area in the source.

As these six theoretical language tools are centred around different theories this broad use as a theoretical framework to interpret the selected data corpus is only useful for a first round or iteration. This first examination of the data corpus with the six different theoretical language tools is aimed at constructing a picture of what the data corpus holds more than what became apparent from the findings of the content analyses rounds.

The tools are to be kept in view when going over the data again on the basis of the results of the search words. When information in the data can be explained by using the tool the selected tool is added in the data processing program as an extra node so it can be generated again in further queries to run.

3.11 Round five = Round two for the discourse analyses

For round five all findings are to be combined and compared between the separate data sources to identify those areas that are the most dense in terms of holding possible information. For this round the data processing software becomes useful. It allows for queries to be run and to cross tabulate coded content from the different rounds.

The results of the findings of the word counts and codes should show the most densely coded areas across the data units. In the annotations notes are made that are then taken in relation to the data found to explain or clarify the density.

3.12 Round six

3.12.1 What discourse analysis approach to take for round six

The data corpus in this research project comprises texts and one transcript of several hours of naturally occurring discourse. For the first 3 rounds content analyses has been used. Round 4 and 5 have been very general discourse analytic approaches to the data. According to van Dijk (n.d.) in Gee and Handford (2012) discourse is like icebergs. Only a small tip of their meaning is shown through explicit meanings expressed in the sentences. For the most part the meaning remains not directly visible and under the surface. So far with rounds 1 to 3 and 4 and 5 this tip of the iceberg has been explored and the explicit meaning of excellence detected. As explained in section 4.7 to fully answer the research question in this project it is necessary to look at what meaning is constructed in contexts by social actors.

The findings after the first 5 rounds provide insight into the explicit meaning given to the notion excellence. At the end of round 5 the findings are about the general meaning given to the notion that relates to its use by the educational organisation. The situated meaning is brought into focus by findings occurring on a different level, namely, the explicit meaning given to the notion by social actors. Conceiving this layering in the use of the notion asks for an analysing round that goes beyond the surface and into the layered use of language to find the hidden or implicit meaning given to the notion of excellence. For this a round six is needed.

Most of the data corpus consists of texts in the form of written documents. These come in the form of policy papers, meeting notes, work by participants and a transcript of an audio recording. As such, the discourse analytic approach of conversation analyses as explained in (Gee and Handford, 2012) is where analysts work mainly with natural occurring interaction as it has been captured in audio recordings and then translated into detailed transcripts.

Corpus-based discourse analyses on the other hand makes use of both quantitative and qualitative textual analyses. Both are combined in such a way as to uncover the non-obvious or implied meaning in the discourse under investigation. This corresponds very well with the applied analytic approaches used in this research project.

As the data corpus is constituted by texts as written material including the audio recording of natural occurring discourse that has been transcribed in such a way that it can be used as a text the question remains as to what discourse analytic techniques are to be used. Van Leeuwen's technique is aimed at unearthing the social regulated ways of doing and is not used. The research question in this research project asks for a technique to discover the meaning given to the word excellence by different actors / agents across different occasions and not for defining the nature of a social practice as van Leeuwen's. Gee's way of conducting discourse analyses along the line of the following themes and questions is to be adopted for the final round six in search of the meaning of excellence as it provides the researcher with the possibility to understand the use of the notion excellence across different occasions and by different agents.

GEE

Significance

How is the piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?

Practices (Activities)

What practice (activity) or practices (activities) is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e. get others to recognise as going on)

Identities

What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e. get others to recognise as operative)? What identity or identities is this piece of language attributing to others and how does this help the speaker or writer enact his own identity?

Relationships

What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?

Politics (the distribution of social goods)

What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating? (i.e. what is being communicated as to what I take to be “normal”, “right”, “good”, “correct”, “proper”, “appropriate”, “valuable”, “the way things are”, “the way things ought to be”, “high status or low status”, “like me or not like me”, and so forth).

Connections

How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?

Sign systems and Knowledge

How does this piece of language privilege or deprivilege specific sign systems (e.g. Spanish vs English, technical language vs everyday language, words vs images, words vs equations etc) or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and believe (e.g. science vs the humanities, science vs “common sense”, biology vs “creation science”?)

3.12.2 Round 6 explained

Round 6’s analysis starts from the matrix that is the result of round 5. This matrix shows the 6 main words used for coding across the data sources belonging to the five units that make up the data corpus.

	A : Betekenis gegeven a...	B : Bijvoeglijk naamwoord	C : kwaliteit	D : Score waardering	E : Stopwoord	F : telwoord
1 : Unit A	58	18	45	58	3	15
2 : Unit B	60	52	61	65	4	17
3 : Unit C	30	5	46	118	15	45
4 : Unit D	5	3	7	7	3	5
5 : Unit E	20	10	132	151	159	58

Table 3.8

By opening the box, the data analysis program takes one into the data and this is presented as an overview of the data sources with the coding results. The source with a highest density in coding results is presented at the top. This source is opened and the screen which is generated is enriched by showing the results of the previous analysis rounds. This is achieved by turning on the coding ribbon and annotations field.

As round 6 is about getting to the implicit meaning, to get beyond the obvious the aim is first to find hotspots of information. The first indication for a hotspot is the source with the highest density of coding results. The denseness of coding corresponds to the studied phenomenon of giving meaning to a notion. At the same time a hotspot is a clue for finding possible interesting discussion in the discourse and therefore potential points of interest in relation the research questions. At this stage the source with the highest density of coding results is opened. This section of text is read again with the previous coding results and annotations. The area then selected is to be treated as a hotspot for round 6.

When a hotspot is detected an extra code is added named “Round six”. This provides the possibility to filter out all hotspots at a later moment to investigate by making use of Gee’s tools as presented above. The next table shows from which units the hotspots (Round six) are taken.

	A : Unit A	B : Unit B	C : Unit C	D : Unit D	E : Unit E
1 : Round Six	4	3	1	1	7

Figure 1

In the next section of this thesis, findings of the analysis are presented in more detail in relation to each hotspot. A screenshot which shows the coding ribbon, annotation and text coded as round six for the worked out findings is included in the appendices (see 8 Appendices from page I). To provide insight in what a visual representation of a hotspot looks like, a random example is presented here.

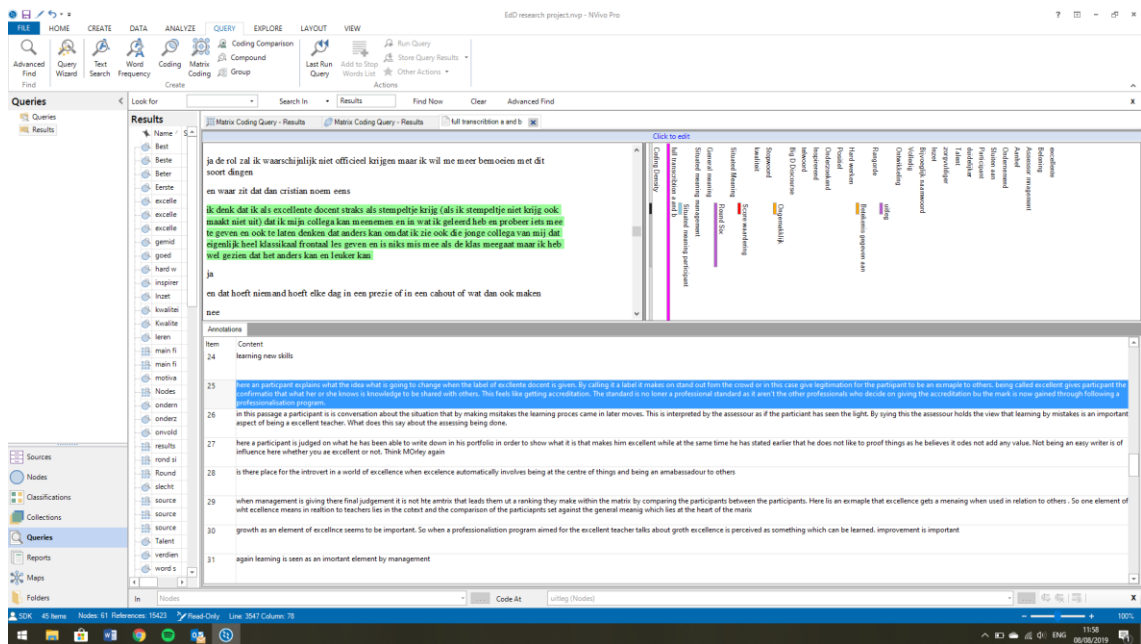


Figure 2

The screenshot shows the text taken that holds the information that will be subjected to the discourse analytical tools provided by Gee as explained above. As all original text is in Dutch a translation is provided. For this translation google translate is used and tidied up by hand. This makes it possible for others to return to the original text by again making use of the google translate application.

The translated text is printed in bold to separate it clearly from the original text that is in Dutch. If the original text were placed in a matrix or laid out in another form this is held on to in the representation of the so-called hotspot in the findings selection. Deciding on how to go about the translation process was not straightforward. According to Holstein and Gubrium, (2008) the question of translating data when doing discourse analyses is a question not often asked or addressed. What becomes apparent from the texts of Holstein and Gubrium (2008) and Gee and Handford (2012) is that it is important to present the empirical material or data in such a manner that both reader and researcher can work from the same information. In relation to translating data a couple of points are presented in Holstein and Gubrium (2008). First there is the importance of presenting the original material next to the translation. Secondly attention is to be given to the notion that translating data is not just a manner of adopting a technique with which to translate them: the researcher must think about the level of detail required when translating.

With all this in mind the decision was made to place the original text and its translation side by side. In deciding on the level of detail the decision was made to stay as close as possible to the

original text. By using a plain one-on-one translation it was possible to stay as far away as possible from reconstruction or interpretation which could happen if a more traditional manner of translating were adopted. For this translation google translate is used and tidied up by hand. This makes it possible for others to return to the original text by again making use of the google translate application.

At a later stage in the research project a suggestion was made to have an independent verification of the translations. Dr. F. Hermans, a Dutch lecturer and teacher educator in an English department of a Dutch teacher training college was approached through a contact of the researcher and asked to verify the translation. He confirmed that the translations of the Dutch texts made were a one-on-one and simple translation of the Dutch texts and provided translation suggestions of his own (see 8.8 Suggestions for translations from page X).

As may become apparent when reading this last round in the methodology chapter it was added at a later stage in the research project. Initially the research plan consisted of five rounds with an unspecified number of iterations. In the next findings chapter (see chapter 4) more explanation will be given on the reason for adding a round six. At the same time adding round six during the course of analysing is an example of discourse analyses as an approach that makes a researcher go over and over the data until nothing new can be found.

4 Findings

In the previous chapter of this thesis the methodology and analytic strategy was described. As presented earlier, the data analysis occurred over a number of rounds and iterations based on the methodology of content analyses which were followed by discourse analyses. In this section the principal findings of the current inquiry will be presented. Each round will be briefly explained to reiterate the essence of the round. Next the results will be presented. For this the results of matrix coding queries will be presented in matrixes but 3 dimensional (3D) charts will also be used.

Presenting results in 3D charts makes looking at the result more visual in comparison to the more traditional way of presenting results in matrixes. Charts represent complex information in a concise way and help to highlight patterns and trends in the data. 3D charts in general complicate the analyses because of a false depth and perspective they give (sj88, n.d.). The argument for using 3D charts in this analysis lies in the fact that there are three ways to look at the data. First there is the source, second is the units in which the source occurs and finally the last element is a search word used for coding. With a 3D graph it becomes possible to present a visual chart that condenses this complex information.

The first three iterations are part of the content analyses and are used to get a feeling of what the data possess but also to sort and finally sift the data. The aim of the content analyses is to end with a reduced amount of data arrived at through a process of sifting and therefore can be said to hold the richest information. With this rich residue of data the next step of discourse analyses is taken. This analysing step is aimed at addressing the main research question of finding the meaning that is given to the notion of excellence within the case studied.

In order to decide when to stop the sorting and sifting by applying content analyses a presentation was given at the GGS annual conference 2018 (Maesse, 2018). The feedback received after giving the presentation in addition to attending other presentations with the aim to find when others stopped sorting was such that the decision was made to stop sifting through the data corpus and progress with the discourse analysis. From the principal findings of the content analyses with iterations one two and three and three further iterations using discourse analytical tools are presented in the sections below.

4.1 Content analysing to sort the data, round one

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the activities undertaken in the first round of content analyses.

Table 4.1

Round one
Write labels for each data source with information on number of words, genre, structure, author.
Generate a word cloud from each data source
Use Gee's (xxxx) intonation tool
Transcribe the audio recoding
Decide to enrich transcription by means of Jeffersonian's transcription (xxxx)

The goal of the activities in this first round is about sorting the data within the data sources and getting a feel for what the sources might possess. A classification is given to the sources on the basis of the information the source possesses and this information is stored in a file attached to the source. One of the following classifications could be attributed to a source:

Advise memo,
 Agenda,
 Assessment,
 Blog,
 E-mail,
 Informative article,
 Meeting notes,
 Policy,
 Portfolio,
 Transcript.

In total 72 different separate sources belonging to the case were gathered. These 72 different data sources were bought together in a data archive structured in a number of units. In the methodology chapter this is explained in more detail but to summarise here, the earlier exercise resulted in the following units:

academic year,

work by participants,
final assessments,
portfolios
and miscellaneous.

Within the unit named Academic year, there was a subdivision into 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. Each data source is read and a label is attached with information such as number of words, genre, structure and author. If possible a short summary of the text or document is given with comments about whose view it seems to hold and whether this is an individual or organisational view. It is possible to make this distinction by looking at the genre of the written work and in some cases the author's role was presented or became known through establishing the genre of the written work. One or more of the following eight different roles could be assigned to a source:

Assessor,
board member,
external advisor,
head of school,
HR professional,
Participant in the program for further development,
Undefined staff member,
Teacher trainer.

From 42 documents it is certain that they are produced in a specific academic year because the date could be found on the document. Looking at these documents produced in each successive academic year shows that as the years progress the number of documents produced diminishes. In addition existing documents get reworked into new versions or are only updated. Table 4.2 provides a more detailed overview of this.

Table 4.2

<i>Academic year</i>	Number of documents	Of which reworked or updated
2013 – 2014	15	-

2014 – 2015	11	1
2015 – 2016	9	2
2016 – 2017	8	2

From all data sources in the data archive only two were written by an author or authors from outside the organisation this case study is made up of. These external advisory writers examined the organisation and the context of the case from the perspective of a research university as well as a university for applied sciences. Thirty-six data sources are written by authors representing the organisation. Of twenty-six data sources the author is a participant in the professionalisation program. The remaining documents are either a mix of writers or it cannot be traced back to a specific author or writer.

Analysing the data along this line does not provide any major findings. It shows that the majority of the material existing within the researched case is generated by individuals from within the organisation. When they come from outside the organisation they are asked to provide an external view of the program. This finding might be because the organisation is deemed to not possess the critical capacity to examine its own context. Another explanation for this finding might be that the organisation wants to have a more objective view on what the programme is doing. But for now this is mere speculation in the concluding chapter more might be said in this light.

In this first round the plan was to use the intonation tool (Gee, 2014). When in the process of analysing the data sources in this first round the intonation tool was used in no other way than by reading the written sources out loud. It provided no other findings as to what was interesting in the sources than the later word search rounds delivered. Thus in hindsight this extra step in sorting the data could have been discarded.

The audio recording of the natural occurring discourse has been transcribed in this first round of content analyses. Transcribing can be considered to be a technical process of documenting a recording. It is also an integral process in qualitative analyses of spoken discourse. In total there were eight hours of audio material to be transcribed into written material. Due to the fact that further analysis would be along the line of discourse analyses and no close-up look at technical issues of the use of the spoken discourse would be needed, the decision was made not to transcribe the total amount of material along the lines of the rules of rich transcription as initially developed by Gail Jefferson (Rapley, 2007; ten Have, 2007). This also made the task of transcribing a more realistic task to do in the time available for the research project. If in the

course of the analyses it would be necessary to look at technical aspects of the spoken discourse there was always the audio recording to go back to and apply the Jefferson rule to a part of the material.

Using the Wordcloud option, the electronic analysing tool provides a word cloud generated from each data source. Each generated word cloud is stored in a file as a jpeg or picture. Finally one word cloud is generated from all data sources together. An example of a word cloud can be found in the appendix (see Wordcloud on page I). In the centre of a word cloud the most frequently used words are shown. These words are taken out of the word clouds to provide the following list with most frequently used words. The words are presented in random order.

Table 4.3

Dutch	English translation
Programma	Program
Deelnemers	Participants
Studenten	Students
Ontwikkeling	Development
Professional	Professional
Leerlingen	Pupils
Excellente	Excellent
Docenten	Teachers
Groep	Group
Collega	Colleague
Onderzoek	Research
Onderzoeken	Inquisitive
Tuinkamer	Gardenroom
Excellentie	Excellence

Onderwijs	Education
Nulmeting	Zero measurement
Eigenaarschap	Ownership
Volgende	Next
Jullie	You
Persoonlijk	Personal
Uitdagend	Challenging
Verslag	Report
Portfolio	Portfolio
Resulaten	Results
Consultative	Consultation
Doener	Doer
Individu	Individual
Gewoon	Ordinary/just
Leren	To learn
Mensen	People
Steeds	Always
Wiskunde	Mathematics
Periode	term

Creating a word cloud from all data sources together presents the following top five words used.

Table 4.4

Dutch	English translation
Leerlingen, studenten	Pupils, students
Onderzoek	Research
Onderwijs	Education
Docenten	Teachers
Excellente	Excellent

Sorting the data sources in these first two ways gives one a feeling for what the data holds. It clearly shows the field of education in which the case is set because it brings words belonging to the field of education clearly to the foreground. It is interesting to see that the nouns “students” or “pupils” are more often used than “teachers” when it is clear that the context of the research from which the data sources originate is a professionalisation program for teachers and not a lesson or classroom. Another interesting finding is that this sorting round does not bring to the surface that the educational domain is vocational education and training. The use of both pupil and student does show that the context is about secondary and vocation education. Furthermore and more of interest for the next round of analysing is that generating the word clouds indicates what words to use in word searches.

4.2 Round two

The plan for round two or the second iteration was to describe the disembedded and situated genre of the sources and to determine whether the documents were strategic or purpose driven. When in the process of analysing, this round was not a separate activity but emerged as a practical way of analysing part of round one and as such will not be described as a separate round. Looking at these steps now after the analysis has taken place it is possible to say that the findings of round two are as follows

The classifications attributed to a source says something about the genre of the source as presented in table 4.5 below. The classifications used can be found in the first column. The second column informs whether the source has a strategic purpose, or is used for strategic purposes in the organisation. For example it might serve a purpose of setting out a course as part of the organisation of the professional development programme.

Table 4.5

Source type	Usage or genre
Advise memo,	Strategic
Agenda,	Strategic and Purpose
Assessment,	Strategic and Purpose
Blog,	Purpose
E-mail,	Purpose
Informative article,	Strategic
Meeting notes,	Strategic and Purpose
Policy,	Strategic
Portfolio,	Purpose
Transcript.	Purpose

The sources that are purpose driven hold information mainly in relation to the organisation and day to day business of the professionalisation course . The sources with a more strategic driven goal are of more interest for further analyses because it is here that it is possible to find what meaning is given to what is going on.

From the participant's point of view the purpose driven sources such as the portfolio and the transcript of the audio recording are interesting to take into consideration for further analyses as well as these might hold the same information but on a more individual level compared to the other documents on an organisational level.

4.3 Round three

This next iteration of the data is the final analysing round under the methodological approach of content analyses. It consists of a number of queries run to find which are the richest data sources. Each step aimed at sifting through the data over and over in order to find and consequently decide on a condensed number of sources to take to the discourse analytical

rounds of the analyses. By sifting through the data in this manner a condensed data corpus should remain that holds discourse rich enough in terms of possessing detailed and layered data as expressed by Fusch and Ness (2015) to delve into when using the methodological approach of discourse analyses.

A word search using the predetermined search words was performed on the data sources. This provides the following result in alphabetical order.

Table 4.6

A	Search word Dutch	English Translation	In data sources	Times used
1	Best	Best	14	74
2	Beste	The best	29	122
3	Beter	Beter	30	185
4	Eerste	First	32	229
5	Excellent	Excellent	30	98
6	Excellente	An excellent ...	64	408
7	Excelleren	To excel	6	13
8	Gemiddelde	Average	7	73
9	Goed	Good	46	619
10	Hard werken	Work hard	29	226
11	Inspireren	Inspiring	27	59
12	Inzet	Effort	16	40
13	Kwaliteit	Quality	22	66
14	Motivatie	Motivation	22	134
15	Onvoldoende	Inadequate	9	17

16	Slecht	Bad	4	8
17	Talent	Talent	7	9
18	Verdiend	Deserved	2	2

These words searched show that the notion excellence and its synonyms are used in the data sources. It is apparent from this table that one could argue that the compiled data archive should hold enough to shed some light on the meaning given to the notion excellence within the examined context. This round also shows that the data sources in relation to the excellent teacher programme possess elements of measuring excellence. This is best indicated in this round three and table 4.6 where measurement resonates. It can be “heard” in some search words used in table 4.6 for example. The search word “goods” resonates measuring for example and it is a word that shows up in 46 data sources and is used 619 times. It does not become clear which manner of assessing is being used in relation to determining whether someone is excellent or not but the idea of measuring is present and as such resonates here. After sorting the process of coding commenced. Each search word was looked up in the data source and the text around the search word was read and a code in the form of a word was attached to the search word found in the text. The coding words or code words were predetermined from the results of the literature review which showed a number of possibilities of meaning given to the notion of excellence (see 2.3 A universal meaning given to excellence within published academic literature from page 8).

The coding process was again an iterative process in the sense that it took several rounds of going through the data sources before all passages were identified and coded. On the basis of what was learned from the literature review five overarching domains were determined from which code words were taken. These five domains were “talent” (Rescher, 2015), “efficiency” and “effectiveness” (Scott, n.d.), “quality” (Ball, 2003; Biesta, 2015; Rescher, 2015), “motivation” and “effort” (Barzun and Philipson, 1991; Little et al., 2007), “ability” and “personality” (Beishuizen et al., 2001; Feldman, 1996; Schon, 1984).

When coding the subsequent passages further code words were added when it became clear from the text in what way a certain passage was used. This is to provide information about passages that might contain more meaning given to the notion of excellence.

This resulted in a total of 26 code words either based on the literature review or based on the way a passage was used in the text. The 26 code words, presented in table 4.7, provide a way

to give a quick insight in the way in which a passage is used. This is still about sorting the data. The next table presents all 26 code words used and whether based on literature review (L) or usage in text (U). Occasionally these overlapped in the case of 'score to show appreciation' for example. A passage might be used to show appreciation but appreciation belongs at the same time to the domains of performance and efficiency and even quality.

Table 4.7

B	Code word/code word Dutch	English Translation	
1	Aanhef	Heading	U
2	Beloning	Reward	L
3	Betekenis geven aan	Giving meaning	U
4	Bijvoeglijk naamwoord	Adjective	U
5	Duidelijker	Clearer	L
6	Hard werken	Working hard	L
7	Inspirerend	Inspiring	L
8	Inzet	Effort	L
9	Kwaliteit	Quality	L
10	Negatief	Negative	L
11	Ondernemend	Enterprising	L
12	Onderzoekend	Enquiring	L
13	Ongemakkelijk	Uncomfortable	L
14	Ontwikkeling	Development	L
15	Positief	Positive	L
16	Rangorde	Order	L

17	Score waardering	Score to show appreciation	U/L
18	Sluiten aan	Connects to	U
19	Stopwoord	Stopgap	U
20	Talent	Talent	L
21	Telwoord	Numeral	U/L
22	Uitleg	Explanation	U
23	Onbekend	Unknown	U
24	Verbetering	Improvement	L
25	Volledig	Complete	L
26	Zorgvuldig	Meticulous	L

If the process of the search words is called A and the process of coding or attributing code words B the next step can be best explained as follows. For each entry under A a code/code word was attributed from B. Sometimes more than one code/code word could be affixed to the entry form under A. This was done both across the predetermined units and the academic years. The predetermined units as explained in the previous chapter (see 3.6 Analyses on page 47) are formed around discourse belonging to the program: unit A being national political discourse in the form of policies; unit B being formal organisational discourse in the form of summaries of meetings and organisational policies; unit C participants discourse in the form of portfolios and reflective papers; unit D informal organisational discourse in the form of blogs and informative intranet entries and finally unit E naturally occurring discourse consisting of transcribed final assessment conversations. In all units the sources can be attributed to either organisational discourse, participants' discourse or in the case of unit E a mixture of both.

Looking at the distribution of the code words across the code words results in an overview presented in the next figure.

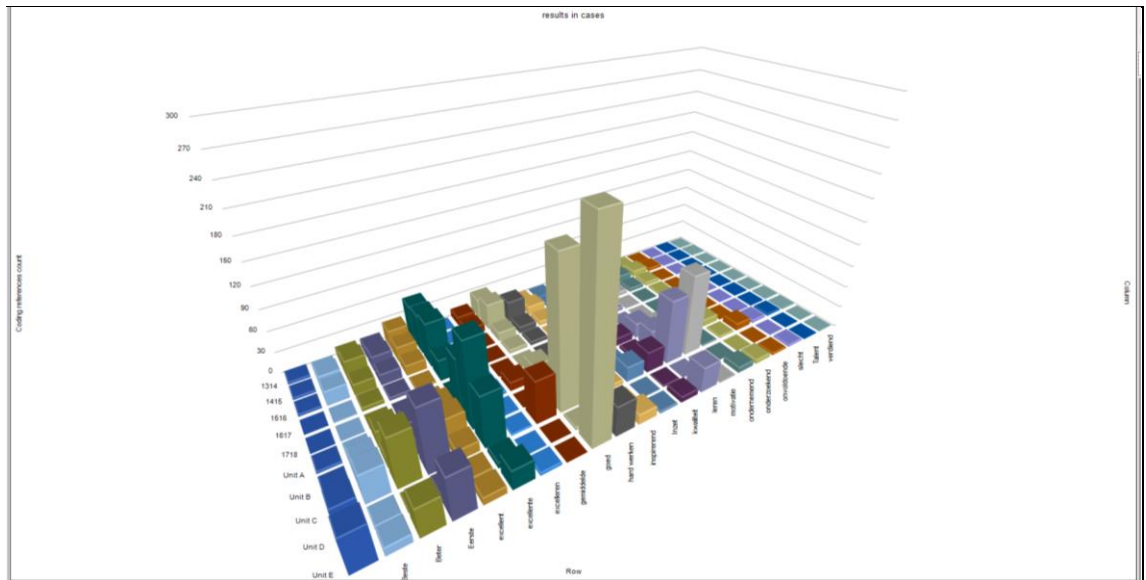


Figure 4

Equally as interesting from the finding of the number of times a code word has been identified can be found in, B 9 quality (table 3.9) and B 17 (table 3.10). These 2 tables show the code word used to identify passages in which a score is given in order to give appreciation or rate excellence.

Table 4.9

Units ->	1314	1415	1516	1617	1718	Unit A	Unit B	Unit C	Unit D	Unit E
B9 quality	30	32	48	13	0	45	61	46	7	132

Table 4.10

Units ->	1314	1415	1516	1617	1718	Unit A	Unit B	Unit C	Unit D	Unit E
B17	49	59	38	7	0	58	65	118	7	151

The question is when does one know when sorting has completed? Or when does one see the big picture (Gee, 2014) so that choices on what features present for further discourse analyses can be made? The major scholars on discourse analyses like Fairclough, (2004, 2003, 1995), Gee, (2014) and Paltridge, (2012) contend that sorting or discourse analyses as a whole is

finished when after repeatedly applying discourse analyses tools and going over the data a number of times a researcher decides that nothing new or interesting can be found. As this research project consists of a content analyses phase for sorting and a discourse analyses phase for finding meaning about a notion the decision on when a phase is completed needs to be made twice.

In order to decide if the sorting phase is completed a presentation was given during the GGS Annual Conference 2018 of the DiscourseNet (Maesse, 2018) about the sorting phase. The feedback received during and after the presentation confirmed that the sorting phase had been rigorously executed and that the discourse analyses phase of the data could commence.

Sorting has brought to the surface a number of results with a high volume of hits of code words across the cases. These are the results to start with for the second phase. Figure five shows this selection.

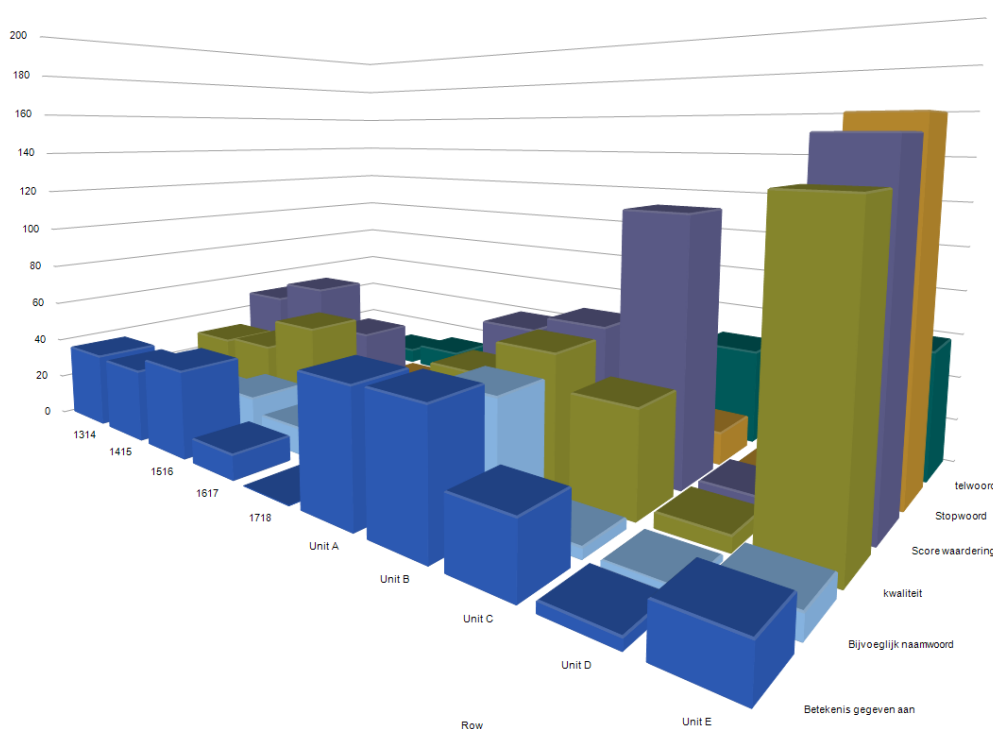


Figure 5

From this the top five of code words are taken for further analyses as presented in figure 5, this being the code words with the highest number of times the code word is used to code a section of a data source. In translation from front to back on the right hand side of the figure these words are; “give meaning”, “adjective”, “quality”, “score rating/appreciation”, “stop word or expletive” and “numeral”. A scan of the underlying data sources revealed that underlying data sources were a cross section of data sources present in the data archive as presented in figures 6 and 7.

	A : Betekenis gegeven a...	B : Bijvoeglijk naamwoord	C : kwaliteit	D : Score waardering	E : Stopwoord	F : telwoord
1 : Unit A	58	18	45	58	3	15
2 : Unit B	60	52	61	65	4	17
3 : Unit C	30	5	46	118	15	45
4 : Unit D	5	3	7	7	3	5
5 : Unit E	20	10	132	151	159	58

Figure 6

	A : Betekenis gegeven a...	B : Bijvoeglijk naamwoord	C : kwaliteit	D : Score wa...	E : Stopwoo...	F : telwoord
1 : advise memo	31	5	15	36	1	3
26 : agenda	3	2	4	5	2	5
51 : Assessment	2	4	8	65	6	1
76 : blog	5	3	7	7	3	5
101 : e-mail	2	7	4	7	0	0
126 : informative article	35	27	45	48	2	10
151 : Meeting notes	17	15	19	13	1	3
176 : Policy	40	11	33	19	2	15
201 : portfolio	61	19	126	182	31	73
226 : transcript	20	10	132	151	159	58

Figure 7

With this the end of the content analyses phase has been reached. This decision is made after identifying that with the five main coding words across the units a cross section of the data sources present in the data archive is to be researched further. This decision was discussed with a fellow EdD student to double check if the moment has been reached that by applying further content analysis nothing more interesting would be found.

4.4 Discourse analytical approach, Round four

As explained in the methodology chapter (see 3 Methodology from page 34) each code word was looked up across the units A to E and the section it relates to taken out of the data source and placed in a separate word file. Take the first code word for example, 3 betekenis geven. For this code word on “giving meaning” a matrix is formed consisting of the units on the left and on the right all sections taken from the sources in that unit.

Each section is then analysed by using the situated meaning tool, the social language tool, the intertextuality tool and the figured world tool. Making use of these tools provides a possibility to bring to the surface how language is used as explained earlier in the methodology chapter (see 3.10 Round four, from page 56).

To illustrate it is necessary to take a look at the first section taken out of the first unit when looking at giving meaning to.

3. Betekenis geven across de Units.

Unit A	Het eerste advies dat wij hierover zouden willen geven is om dit programma uit te voeren onder de noemer <i>Professionalisering van docenten voor excellent onderwijs</i> , of iets van die strekking. Hiermee wordt de aandacht gericht op continue professionalisering van docenten met als doel <i>excellent onderwijs</i> , in plaats van op het meer of minder <i>excellent zijn/worden van docenten bij Onderwijsgroep Tilburg</i> . Waarschijnlijk sluit dit streven naar verbetering en optimalisering van het onderwijs van Onderwijsgroep Tilburg goed aan bij de motivatie van docenten.
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Figure 8

In translation:

(The first piece advice we would like to give is to perform this program under the name *Further professional development for excellent education*, or something along these lines. By doing so attention is on continuous professional development of teachers with an aim for excellent education instead of aiming on becoming more or less excellent by teachers of Onderwijsgroep Tilburg. This will probably connect better to the striving for improving and optimising education at Onderwijsgroep Tilburg which is the motiva(tion of the teachers in the program).

With the situated meaning tool one tries to find out what specific meaning is given to words or in this case a section within a context. This section is taken from Unit A. The data source is an advice paper by an external party related to the professionalisation program. Within this context of an external advisory party the meaning given to excellence in relation to the excellent teacher is related to continuous professionalisation and continuous improving of education and teaching.

Applying the social language tool confirms that the section comes from an advisory party. This does nothing for the meaning given to the notion. When applying the intertextuality tool what becomes apparent is that the writer of the section must have seen other sources. The section refers to participants in the program “which is the motivation of the teachers.”; but also to sources related to the organisation “... to strive for improving and optimising education at Onderwijsgroep Tilburg”. Applying the figured world tool shows something interesting. In the context being excellent in relation to being a teacher is apparently not typical. The more typical option is to relate excellence to education. The typical option here then is to link teacher quality with further professional development and not with excellence. But because the organisation has linked excellence to teachers the normal or typical for the organisation is that further professional development is linked to excellence in teaching and therefore quality of education. For the organisation the big D Discourse can now be identified as that belonging to an economic discourse where further professional development and excellence related to this is aimed at the continuous improvement of education.

Each time a tool was used during the analyses a new code was made in the analysing program so it could be used in later queries. When running the analysis on all items in the data corpus

not all tools were used. On the other hand the situated meaning tools were divided in order to bring more detailed information forward in the code word used. The end result of round four was made visual by running a query in the software program that generated a matrix showing the end result of round four.

	A : Unit A ▼	B : Unit B ▼	C : Unit C ▼	D : Unit D ▼	E : Unit E ▼
1 : Big C discourse ▼	0	1	0	0	0
2 : Big D Discourse ▼	5	20	2	4	2
3 : General meaning ▼	19	27	0	3	15
4 : Situated Meaning ▼	7	8	0	0	3
5 : Situated meaning management ▼	0	10	1	0	25
6 : Situated meaning participant ▼	15	5	2	4	31

Figure 9 Screenshot showing the end result of round four.

The findings of round four can best be summarised by placing the results in a matrix. In the matrix the findings on the ways meaning is roughly related to a situation and from a perspective are presented.

Situation	Perspective
From an organisational managerial perspective meaning given to the notion is aimed at the own organisation and used in the light of strategic goals and policy deployment.	From an organisational HR perspective meaning given to the notion is aimed at attracting teachers to participate in the professional development program.
From an organisation HR perspective meaning given to the notion is aimed at further professional development as an instrument to reach the institutional strategic goals.	From the perspective of teachers participating in the programme meaning is given to the notion with non-explicit aim.

This round results in findings that could be interpreted only in broad terms and findings that were made quickly visible. To get more into the detailed use of what the data holds another iteration is needed. The findings from this iteration are presented in round five and can be found in the next section.

4.5 Round five

Round five proved to be a difficult round because the software program came up with some limitations. The choice made to use the annotations possibility of the program as explained (see 3.11 Round five = Round two for the discourse analyses on page 58) did not give the

possibility to run a queries on the annotations. They did show up however when activating the annotations in the view setting of the program.

It was not possible to generate overviews from which to work. As a part-time research student from abroad all contact with the supervisor had been via online video calls. Because of the situation that no overviews could be generated the choice was made to have a face to face tutorial with the supervisor. This involved making an oversea trip to the University to make it possible to go through the results present in the data analysing program.

This proved to be a worthwhile trip. It provided the possibility to explain to the supervisor what had taken place during round five and showing it on screen, namely that of going over the areas selected at the end of round four and using the annotations possibility to analyse along a more discourse analytical approach using Gee's tools. This moment of explaining turned out to be an analysing moment in itself. During the course of the supervision it became clear that round five did not provide the deeper discourse analytical findings. Another round is needed to find more detail about the way in which the notion of excellence is used.

4.6 Round six

In this section the findings are presented from round six. As explained in the methodology chapter (see 3.12.2 Round 6 explained, from page 60) this round aims to find the implicit meaning presented in the data corpus and by doing so brings to the surface what is normally under the surface in situations where people use language.

The findings are presented in the order of the units present in the data corpus. This means it starts with findings from unit A leading up to unit E. Each finding starts with a print screen picture taken from the software program. It provides a visual representation of a densely coded and annotated area or hotspot. These pictures are placed in the appendix to this thesis.

4.6.1 Unit A

In the first hotspot or area of dense coding as explained in the methodology chapter (see 3.12.2 Round 6 explained. From page 60) taken from Unit A and presented in Figure 11 on page 61 the following passage can be found.

(1)Met het High Potential Programma *De excellente docent* streeft Onderwijsgroep Tilburg naar professionele docenten die zich individueel én collectief ontwikkelen gericht op het realiseren van duurzaam excellent onderwijs.

(1) With the High Potential Programme *The excellent teacher*” Onderwijsgroep Tilburg strives for professional teachers whose individual and collective development is aimed at realising long lasting (sustainable) excellent education.

(2) De onderliggende visie hierbij is dat professionalisering van docenten een continu en collectief proces is dat hand in hand gaat met organisatie-ontwikkeling.

(2) With this the underlying vision is that teacher professionalisation is a continuous and collective process which goes hand in hand with organisational development.

(3) Het eerste advies dat wij hierover zouden willen geven is om dit programma uit te voeren onder de noemer *Professionalisering van docenten voor excellent onderwijs*, of iets van die strekking.

(3) The first piece of advice we would like to give about this is to put the program into effect under the title *Teacher Professionalisation for (aimed at) excellent education* or something in that order.

(4) Hiermee wordt de aandacht gericht op continue professionalisering van docenten met als doel excellent onderwijs, in plaats van op het meer of minder excellent zijn/worden van docenten bij Onderwijsgroep Tilburg.

(4) With this attention is focussed at continuously professionalising teachers aimed at excellent education instead at becoming excellent as a teacher at Onderwijsgroep Tilburg.

(5) Waarschijnlijk sluit dit streven naar verbetering en optimalisering van het onderwijs van Onderwijsgroep Tilburg goed aan bij de motivatie van docenten.

(5) Presumably this attempt for improving and optimising education at Onderwijsgroep Tilburg connects well with teacher motivation.

In the text above there is one author of the text and two principals (those whose position is put in the text (Goffman, 1981)). For sentence (1) and (2) the principal is the organisation “Onderwijsgroep Tilburg”. For sentence (3), (4) and (5) the principal is the researcher who has conducted a monitoring research of which this advisory text is a result.

When the principal in sentence (1) and (2) is the organisation it should be possible to find out what the position of the organisation is in relation to teacher professionalisation and excellence. This text is significant in the way that although it speaks of the organisation “Onderwijsgroep Tilburg” it means that the board and management of the organisation take a position in relation to the topic. It might provide an insight into the way the board and management relate to the topic. The significance of knowing this lies in the fact that it can tell

whether the board and management relate to the topic from a specific stance or viewpoint. In order to find meaning it is worth knowing if the board and management relate to the topic from a teacher development perspective or an organisational perspective for instance. The significance of this text is that it places this text at the level of organisation policies from which the activity of teacher professionalisation is developed. In sentence (1) it becomes clear that at its core the programme is aimed at long lasting excellent education. From an organisational point of view this is important because it means that student enrolment is continuous. A place for the organisation in the daily urban system is more secure in future when the education that it provides is excellent.

For the vocational education colleges the local urban areas are seen as the context in which to operate and to contribute. Students mainly come from this context but the businesses in the same area are important as well as they provide internships but also employ the graduates from the colleges. Thus having a “good” vocational educational system in the local urban system helps the local economy,

Having a school in a daily urban system can be seen as a social good. That this text deals with the distribution of goods or politics is also shown using words such as “long lasting” and “excellent”. Reaching this long-lasting excellent education through teacher professionalisation communicates that it is the normal thing to do. Professionalisation becomes a commodity.

Sentence (2) gives more information about teacher professionalisation. This sentence connects teacher professionalisation as a continuous and collective process with organisational development. This peddles the belief the organisation has that teacher professionalisation is an activity that must be organised not as an individual but collective exercise. It shows the assumption that learning by professionals takes place in a group. Here we can see the coupling of organisational development with the belief that professional learning is a group activity; moreover, this piece of language serves to emphasise that it is the group members’ responsibility to develop themselves in groups.

Naming the professionalisation program the “excellent teacher” now seems to be somewhat out of place as the program does not focus on an individual but on a group. This connects to sentence (3) in which the researcher advises the renaming of the programme to focus more on the professionalisation aspect of the programme.

Sentence (4) and (5) tell us more about the way excellence seems to connect to teacher professionalisation. Sentence (4) expresses that the focus of the professionalisation program is more on enhancing the excellence of the education and less on the excellence of growth in excellence in individual teachers. This might not only optimise education with in the school

(sentence 5) but also connects to the motivation of teachers who participate in the programme. This is significant in the sense that excellence as part of the name of the programme “Excellente Docenten” seems to relate more to organisational development and the excellence of the education provided than of the excellence of the individuals working within the organisation.

The next hotspot (see Figure 12 on page II) is taken from a policy paper from within the organisation to address the start of a new cohort. It is the final version of a document used across the academic years the professionalisation programme was active. This final version is the most complete in the sense that it encompasses everything that is present in earlier versions of this document. As this is the most complete version of this document it is to be considered significant.

The author of the text is not the principal. The principal is the organisation. The entry taken from this text and numbered below as (1) presents the profile the organisation has made to describe the excellent teacher.

(1)De excellente docent als ondernemende, onderzoekende en inspirerende professional, die effectief, overtuigend en authentiek handelt.

(1)The excellent teacher as an →entrepreneurial, inquiring and inspiring →professional, who →acts effective, convincing and authentic.

Indicated by the arrow the modifiers are presented and attributed to an excellent teacher. Immediately after (the second arrow) the teacher is connected to professional. After the third arrow three manners in which the excellent teacher is to act are presented.

From this data, it might become clear that the excellent teacher should have a number of skills or abilities (first arrow), and present these by acting in a number of ways (third arrow).

Taking the first from both areas it is found that an excellent teacher knows how to be an effective entrepreneur. To go on along this line the excellent teacher is able to inquire in a convincing manner and inspire in an authentic way.

It is clear that the profile is aimed at an individual and that the individual must hold a number of capabilities. The second passage presented next is taken from this section and goes into more detail about the three modifiers attributed to the excellent teacher as they are presented after the first arrow.

<p>1Ondernemend</p> <p>1entrepreneurial</p> <p>1.1-Je voelt je verantwoordelijk om onderwijs te verbeteren.</p> <p>1.1-You feel responsibility to improve education</p> <p>1.2- Je levert een bijdrage aan de ontwikkeling naar excellent onderwijs.</p> <p>1.2-you contribute to excellent education.</p> <p>1.3- Dit doe je in samenhang met externe ontwikkelingen.</p> <p>1.3-You do this in coherence with external developments.</p> <p>1.4- Je neemt hiertoe het initiatief.</p> <p>1.4-You take up the initiative for this.</p> <p>1.5- Je speelt in op kansen en bedreigingen.</p> <p>1.5-You respond to opportunities and threats.</p> <p>1.6- Je laat je inspireren door de omgeving.</p> <p>1.6- You let yourself be inspired by the environment</p> <p>1.7- Je onderneemt actie.</p> <p>1.7-You take action</p> <p>1.8- Je stelt je lerend op.</p> <p>1.8- You take a learning position.</p> <p>1.9- Je stelt aannames en vanzelfsprekendheden ter discussie.</p> <p>1.9-You question assumptions and self-explanations.</p> <p>1.10- Je komt tot onderbouwde en nieuwe aanpakken die je zelf uitvoert of met collega's.</p> <p>1.10- You come to substantiated and new approaches that you implement yourself or with colleagues.</p>	<p>2Onderzoekend</p> <p>2inquiring</p> <p>2.1- Je bent nieuwsgierig.</p> <p>2.1-You are curious.</p> <p>2.2- Je hebt een analytische/ kritische houding.</p> <p>2.1- You have an analytical / critical attitude.</p> <p>2.3- Je neemt hiervoor kennis van onderzoeken, literatuur en ontwikkelingen.</p> <p>2.3- For this you take note of research, literature and developments.</p> <p>2.4- Je doorziet implicaties.</p> <p>2.4- You see the implications</p> <p>2.5- Je kan op basis hiervan eigen positie bepalen.</p> <p>2.5- You can determine your own position based on this.</p> <p>2.6- Je kan hierop visie ontwikkelen.</p> <p>2.6- You can develop a vision on this.</p> <p>2.7- Je kan ook een kritische blik naar binnen maken, naar het eigen handelen.</p> <p>2.7- You can also take a critical look inside, at your own actions.</p> <p>2.8- Je evalueert je eigen leerproces.</p> <p>2.8- You evaluate your own learning process.</p> <p>2.9- Je kan problemen vertalen naar onderzoekbare vragen gericht op diagnose en interventie.</p> <p>2.9- You can translate problems into researchable questions focused on diagnosis and intervention</p>	<p>3Inspirerend</p> <p>3inspiring</p> <p>3.1-Je zorgt voor een positieve en uitdagende leeromgeving en je bent hierin een voorbeeld.</p> <p>3.1- You provide a positive and challenging learning environment and you are an example in this.</p> <p>3.2- Je levert bijdrage aan innovatieprocessen.</p> <p>3.2- You contribute to innovation processes.</p> <p>3.3- Je levert bijdrage aan de professionaliteit van collega's, teams en school.</p> <p>3.3- You contribute to the professionalism of colleagues, teams and schools.</p> <p>3.4- Je daagt collega's intellectueel uit.</p> <p>3.4- You intellectually challenge colleagues.</p> <p>3.5- Je ondersteunt en motiveert collega's</p> <p>3.5- You support and motivate colleagues.</p> <p>3.6- Je kan de visie van de school communiceren.</p> <p>3.6- You can communicate the vision of the school.</p> <p>3.7- Je hebt kennis van visieontwikkeling, onderwijsorganisatie, professionaliseringscultuur, ontwikkeling en veranderprocessen.</p> <p>3.7- You have knowledge of vision development, educational organization, professionalisation of culture, development and change processes.</p> <p>3.8- Je kan deze kennis vertalen op een authentieke wijze.</p>
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<p>1.11- Je breidt je referentiekaders uit, context is binnen de uitvoering van het onderwijs.</p> <p>1.11- You expand your frame of reference, context is within the implementation of education.</p>		<p>3.8- You can translate this knowledge in an authentic way.</p>
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Directly the use of the personal pronoun “you” becomes apparent. All moderators are attributed to a single person. With the understanding that the principal of the text is the organisation, it becomes clear is that the excellent teacher is always an individual, but also an individual who is part of a team as becomes clear when focussing at numbers: 1.10,3.3,3.4 and 3.5. This is not as an equal among colleagues but as a leading example to others as becomes clear in 3.4 for example: “You intellectually challenge colleagues” in this sentence “you” equals the excellent teacher who challenges others. In other words the excellent teacher is the one to follow. The moderator “inquiring” is exclusively aimed at the learning and developing of the self. This is to be found in 2.8 most strongly with the need to evaluate “your own learning process”. This brings being curious and inquisitive into the learning discourse. The output of learning must be put into tools for “diagnosis and intervention” as can be found in 2.9. The moderator “inspiring” is aimed at inspiring colleagues and educational teams.

All three moderators connect the excellent teacher to improve other teachers and educational teams. It shows signs of pulling the field of education into the field of business economics. A clear sign of this is under 3.7 for example because it uses notions as “change processes” and “vision development”. It connects the professionalisation program to educational and educational organisational development and change and disconnects it from the actual teaching and classroom activities related to teaching.

In unit A the data also present a system with which to assess the excellent teacher. It also is present in the next hotspot (see Figure 13 on page II).

The author of the source is an advisor from outside the VET college and belongs to a teacher trainer college that also provides a number of lectures in the professionalisation program. From information in the meeting notes it can be learned that information presented within the source is based on the expert advice from the teacher training college and mixed with the ideas and insights from management from the VET college. On the basis of this it is possible to state that the information in the data source is from a principal source and is deemed important enough to use.

In the data source three rubrics are presented related to the three moderators presented and explained above. With each moderator five different descriptions of behaviour are presented that explain what is to be found within an excellent teacher. Again assessment resonates here but it is not clear whether summative, formative or ipsative assessment is used. From the result of the individuals' score a standard is given about how excellent the individual is. This is expressed as follows:

<p>Normering: De rubrics zijn als volgt opgebouwd: van beginnend (1) naar excellent (5), met de focus op het doel: de excellente docent (5), die zich immer lerend opstelt.</p>	<p>Standardisation: The rubrics are structured as follows: from starting (1) to excellent (5), with the focus on the goal: the excellent teacher (5), who always takes a learning position.</p>
<p>Voldoende: de deelnemende docent scoort de drie verwachtingen minimaal op 3 en dit wordt in het criteriumgericht interview bevestigd</p>	<p>Sufficient: the participating teacher scores the three expectations at least at 3 and this is confirmed in the criteria-oriented interview</p>
<p>Goed: de deelnemende docent scoort de drie verwachtingen op 4 of 5 en dit wordt in het criteriumgericht interview bevestigd</p>	<p>Good: the participating teacher scores the three expectations at 4 or 5 and this is confirmed in the criteria-oriented interview.</p>

The results in the section in the table above show that it becomes clear that there are gradations in how excellent a teacher can be. A teacher can be "sufficient excellent" or "good excellent". In the rubric there is also a description of behaviour and or skills associated with scores 1 to 5. Having this distribution of scores attributed to being excellent shows that excellence is distributed as an item by the organisation. Having a 5 point scoring system in which the lowest score also means that one is excellent shows the importance to the owner of the programme for participants in the program to be considered excellent. Handing out an excellent score as a definite for those participating in the programme radiates the importance of the programme for the organisation. The importance connects to what else is of importance to the educational organisation. The other hotspot present in Unit A and shown above makes the connection to the importance of continuous improving for the organisation. The same connection can be made here. From an organisational perspective it is deemed important to have excellent teachers. This importance becomes clear when looked at in terms of what the

underlying descriptions of behaviour or gained knowledge are in expectations of the excellent teacher.

De verwachtingen Excellente docent

Expectations in relation to the excellent teacher

Ondernemend				
5	4	3	2	1
Je hebt een visie ontwikkeld omtrent excellent lesgeven en initieert vernieuwingen binnen (en buiten) je team.	Je neemt een coachende houding aan voor je collega's om het lesgeven te ontwikkelen richting excellent lesgeven,	Je draagt je ontwikkelde inzichten in lesgeven op grond van reflecties en ervaringen uit naar collega's.	Je stelt je eigen lesgeven bij op grond van reflecties en bevindingen.	Je reflecteert op je eigen lesgeven: langs de lat van nieuwe ontwikkelingen.

Enterprising

5 You have developed a vision regarding excellent teaching and initiate innovations within (and outside) your team.

4 You adopt a coaching attitude for your colleagues to develop teaching towards excellent teaching,

3 You transfer your developed insights into teaching based on reflections and experiences to colleagues.

2 You adjust your own teaching based on reflections and findings.

1 You reflect on your own teaching: along the bar of new developments.

Onderzoekend				
5	4	3	2	1
Je kunt problemen vertalen naar onderzoeksvragen, gericht op diagnose en interventievraagstukken, door argumenten te verzamelen en de dialoog voeren binnen (en buiten) je team. Je creëert hiermee een professionele leergemeenschap.	Je draagt je ontwikkelde inzichten, aanpakken en onderzoeksvragen op het gebied van nieuwe inzichten en strategieën in het lesgeven in het MBO, maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen, ontwikkelingen in het beroepenveld en de wet- en regelgeving uit in je team. Tevens speel je in op kansen en bedreigingen.	Je komt tot onderbouwde en nieuwe aanpakken en nieuwe onderzoeksvragen op het gebied van nieuwe inzichten en strategieën in het MBO, maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen, ontwikkelingen in het beroepenveld en de wet- en regelgeving.	Je reflecteert op je eigen leerproces en stelt onderzoeksvragen aan de hand van nieuwe inzichten en strategieën in het lesgeven in het MBO, maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen, ontwikkelingen in het beroepenveld en de wet- en regelgeving.	Je hebt je verdiept in nieuwe inzichten en strategieën in het lesgeven in het MBO, maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen, ontwikkelingen in het beroepenveld en de wet- en regelgeving.

Inquiring

5 You can translate problems into research questions, focused on diagnosis and intervention issues, by collecting arguments and conducting dialogue within (and outside) your team. You thereby create a professional learning community.

4 You disseminate your developed insights, approaches and research questions in the field of new insights and strategies in MBO teaching, social developments, developments in the professional field and legislation and regulations in your team. Also you respond to opportunities and threats.

3 You come to substantiated and new approaches and new research questions in the field of new insights and strategies in the MBO, social developments, developments in the professional field and legislation and regulations.

2 You reflect on your own learning process and you state research questions based on new insights and strategies in teaching MBO, social developments, developments in the professional field and legislation and regulations.

Inspirerend				
5	4	3	2	1
Je levert je bijdrage aan innovatieprocessen op een dusdanige manier dat collega's binnen (en buiten) je team hierdoor geïnspireerd worden. Je draagt zorg voor een professionele leergemeenschap. Je draagt de schoolvisie uit binnen en buiten de organisatie.	Je levert een bijdrage aan de professionaliteit van je team en de school door je authentieke vertaling van kennis rondom visieontwikkeling, onderwijsorganisatie, professionaliseringscultuur, ontwikkeling en veranderprocessen op schoolniveau uit te dragen. Je motiveert en ondersteunt je collega's.	Je communiceert je authentieke vertaling van kennis rondom visieontwikkeling, onderwijsorganisatie, professionaliseringscultuur, ontwikkeling en veranderprocessen met je collega's. Je daagt hiermee je collega's uit.	Je hebt kennis rondom visieontwikkeling, onderwijsorganisatie, professionaliseringscultuur, ontwikkeling en veranderprocessen en kunt deze kennis authentiek vertalen. Hiermee ben je een voorbeeld voor je collega's.	Je vergaart kennis rondom visieontwikkeling, onderwijsorganisatie, professionaliseringscultuur, ontwikkeling en veranderprocessen en kunt deze kennis vertalen.

1 You have studied new insights and strategies in teaching MBO, social developments, developments in the professional field and legislation and regulations.

Inspiring

5 You contribute to innovation processes in such a way that colleagues within (and outside) your team are inspired by this. You ensure a professional learning community. You carry out the school vision within and outside the organisation.

4 You contribute to the professionalism of your team and the school by propagating your authentic translation of knowledge concerning vision development, educational organisation, professionalisation culture, development and change processes at school level. You motivate and support your colleagues.

3 You communicate your authentic translation of knowledge around vision development, educational organisation, professionalisation culture, development and change processes with your colleagues. With this you challenge your colleagues.

2 You have knowledge about vision development, educational organisation, professionalisation culture, development and change processes and you can translate this knowledge in an authentic way. This makes you an example for your colleagues.

1 You gain knowledge all around vision development, educational organisation, professionalisation culture, development and change processes and can translate this knowledge.

In the description of behavioural aspects and or gained knowledge related to score 1 to 5 in being excellent the focus is in all on the educational organisation. An interesting finding is that the word student or pupil is not used. This fact underlines the very strong connection between excellence and the development of the organisational development. It makes clear the importance of success of the programme from an organisational perspective.

4.6.2 Unit B

The first hotspot from unit B (see Figure 14 on page III) is taken from a larger text in which the organisation is portrayed from the perspective of a number of different people involved in the programme De Excellente Docent. In this section the principal is a participating teacher of the programme. This section is significant because it shows why the programme is important for a participant (sentence 1 and 2) and the tension it holds in relation to the intention the program holds for the organisation (sentence 9 and 10). Note that sentence 6 is a heading for a new paragraph and does not relate to the sentences directly before and after this heading and that are under inquiry here.

(1)Het programma Excellente docent richt zich echt op het verbeteren van het primaire proces in de klas.

(1)The programme the Excellent Teacher is really aimed at improving the teaching process in the classroom.

(2)Ik heb nooit een andere ambitie gehad.

(2)I have never had another ambition.

(3)Ik vind het lesgeven gewoon heel fijn om te doen en mijn vak Burgerschapskunde wordt steeds belangrijker in de huidige maatschappij.

(3)I just find teaching very nice to do and my subject Burgerschapskunde becomes more and more important in our contemporary society.

(4)Zeker bij studenten op niveau 2.

(4)Especially with level 2 students.

(5)Juist als je iets lang doet, dan is het goed om er een keertje naar te kijken en een nieuwe uitdaging aan te gaan.

(5) Especially when you do something for a long time already it is good to look at it at ones and go for new challenges.

(6) Geen grote verschillen

(6) No major differences.

(7) De selectie was spannend, maar ik ben er goed doorheen gekomen.

(7) The selection was a tense moment but I passed it well

(8) De opleiding bestaat uit drie lijnen: kennis, reflectie en praktijkonderzoek.

(8) The training consists of three lines: knowledge, reflection and practice based research.

(9) De kennislijn ging in eerste instantie over organisatie en management en het heeft even geduurd voordat ik daar het nut voor docenten in zag.

(9) The knowledge line was at first mainly about organisation and management and it took a while before I saw the utility for teachers in this.

(10) Het programma ging toch over lesgeven?

(10) The programme should be about teaching?

(11) Nu zie ik dat je bij veranderingen mensen mee moet krijgen en zelf initiatief moet nemen.

(11) It is now that I see that you need to take people along and show your own initiative when you want to change something.

In sentence 1 and 2 the participant tells us what the aim of the programme is, namely that of improving the teaching process in the classroom and how this connects to the persons own ambition. In sentence 8 and 9 the participant explains the lines the programme consists of and explicates that in the programme focus was on knowledge about organisation and management. Sentence 10 is a question which expresses that the expectation of the participant was that the knowledge line within the programme ought to be about teaching.

Knowing that the section is taken from a text about the excellent teaching professionalisation program a finding in this section could be that the perspective on excellence is communicated differently by the participant than by those who organised the program. The participant relates excellent in relation to a teacher and to what takes place within a classroom while those who have made the programme also focus on managerial and organisational perspectives of education and thus focus more on actions or situations taking place outside the classroom.

Sentence 11 connects the view of the participant to the view of the organisation. And because we know that this text was produced at the end of the professionalisation programme for this particular participant it can be argued that in the end the views might not differ that much.

The next section (see Figure 15 on III) page is also taken from the same source. The words are not the author's but taken down after speaking to a participant in the programme. The participant here is the principal. The participant expresses what the word excellence did to her.

(1) Het hele begrip van excellent was verschrikkelijk.

(1) The whole notion of excellent was terrible.

(2) Ik vond het gênant.

(2) I found it embarrassing.

(3) Wij zijn niet excellent, dat word je nooit omdat het een proces is.

(3) We are not excellent, you will never be because it is a process.

The principal in this section expresses that being part of a group for whom the notion excellence was used as a moderator found this embarrassing. This becomes clear from sentence number 2 where the word "it" can be substituted for "excellent". Sentence 3 informs us that the use of "excellence" is as an adverb to the group of participants.

This is significant because it brings forward that this participant does not call herself excellent but that it is a notion used by others. Sentence 3 does also show that the participant does have an idea about what excellence should be made out of. By stating "you will never be because it is a process" it becomes clear that being an excellent teacher is not a stationary state of being but can be part of an ongoing development of the individual.

Such striving to be better and constant improving links to the ideas of individual development as an economic or managerial commodity to employ in improving professional practice. Because of this it can be argued that the participant does not mind being a commodity for an educational organisation in a strive for continuous improving but does mind being named excellent. This striving for getting better and improving can also be found via another voice in this data source.

This next voice is present in a hotspot (see Figure 16 on page IV) and are the words spoken by a HR staff member and can be seen as significant because it resonates what the organisation aims at with the excellent teacher programme; but it also shows the ideas about the

programme in relation to the institutional mission or vision in relation to education and teaching.

(1) Beste onderwijs van Nederland

(1) Best education in the Netherlands

(2) Ik geloof dat we met het programma Excellente docenten als organisatie een stap zetten.

(2) I believe that we are taking a step forward as an organisation with the program Excellent teachers.

(3) Als je het beste onderwijs van Nederland wilt verzorgen, dan moet je de beste docenten in huis hebben.

(3) If you want to provide the best education in the Netherlands, you need the best teachers.

(4) Docenten die echt het verschil kunnen maken.

(4) Teachers who can really make a difference.

(5) Dat verschil maken zit hem in *drive*, betrokkenheid, innovatie en nieuwsgierigheid.

(5) Making that difference lies in drive, involvement, innovation and curiosity.

(6) Het gaat om de route, je bent daarmee nooit klaar.

(6) It's about the route, you're never done with that.

(7) De *mindset* achter de doelen 'Beste onderwijs van Nederland' en Excellente docenten is dezelfde, die passen op elkaar.

(7) The mindset behind the goals "Best education in the Netherlands" and Excellent teachers is the same, which fit together.

In the text above the principal links the excellent teacher program (sentence 2) to the need for the best teachers (sentence 3) and to moderators as drive involvement, innovation and curiosity (sentence 5). This shows previous knowledge on what it is that makes an excellent teacher because the link is made so fluently.

Furthermore the excellent teacher programme is linked to the notion of being a route. So an excellent teacher does not just exist; it is something a teacher becomes. Sentence 6 is clear about this. It is a route that is to be followed in order to become excellent.

Finally linking two goals of the educational organisation together in sentence 7 ties the excellent program with the continuous improvement of education and the striving to be the best educational organisation in the Netherlands. This links in with the market driven way of

working educational organisations have been asked to adhere to in order to strive for qualitatively better educational organisations as expressed by the Dutch Government as far as 2012 (Harris and Biesta, 2017).

4.6.3 Unit C

The hotspot from this section (see Figure 17 on page IV) is a section in a portfolio by one of the participants in the programme. This selected hotspot is significant not only because it showed up as a high density coded source but even more so because it reports on actual words spoken by a board member of the organisation in relation to the professionalisation programme.

(1)De heer Cxxx Gxxxxx (lid CvB XXX) zei op 4 juli 2014 tijdens de afsluitende bijeenkomst van het eerste jaar van het Excellente docent-traject:

(1)Mr Cxxx Gxxxx (member of the board XXX) spoke at the closing meeting of the first academic year of the Excellente Docenten on the 4th July 2014

(2)"...dat een traject als het excellente docent-traject emotie oproept omdat je excellentie gaat benoemen en "afscheid" neemt van het gelijke-monniken-gelijkkappen **(A)** denken.

(2)"... a course like the excellente docent brings out emotions because you are identifying excellence and say "goodbye" to thinking that everybody is equal.

(3)Als dat dan als resultaat heeft dat er over excellentie gepraat wordt, dan kun je in dialoog gaan en de betekenis hiervan onderzoeken en de verschillen ontdekken.

(3) If this then results in talking about excellence, one can enter a dialogue and investigate the meaning of this and find differences.

(4)De neuzen hoeven niet per se dezelfde kant uit **(B)**, maar juist de discussie over de verschillende zienswijzen ten aanzien van kennis, houding en gedrag in relatie tot excellent docentschap, creëert het excellente onderwijs."

(4)Not everyone has to be on the same page, precisely the discussion on different views about knowledge, attitude and behaviour in reaction to excellent teaching create excellent education".

Although the author is a participant of the program the principal in this section is a member of the board of the VET college. This section is significant not only because it expresses the view of the organisation in relation to excellence and the professionalisation program but also because it shows the relationship between the notion excellence and the participants in the professionalisation programme.

Sentence number four shows in this piece of direct speech, written in a participant's portfolio, that in relation to what excellence means not everybody needs to be on the same page. By stating this the organisation is actually saying that it does not have a clear definition for the notion excellence in relation to the professionalisation program. What they do say is that excellence connects dialogue about different views on knowledge, attitude and behaviour (in teaching) to excellent teaching.

On its own this is not really clear. Sentence number 3 provides clarity because it shows the importance of connecting the dialogue with investigating meaning and finding differences. So to summarise it means to be inquisitive.

Also of interest in this section is sentence number 2. This sentence shows by saying that the use of excellence brings out emotions and using the phrase "saying goodbye" in relation to an apparent thinking of equality shows that the notion is somewhat contested. This also demonstrates that for the organisation thinking in differences in relation to teachers is good. Thus by using the notion excellence the organisation is actually using it politically, to distribute goods among their employees so to speak. One is an excellent teacher or one is not.

In this rare piece of direct speech by a member of the board it is interesting to see that in these four sentences twice a Dutch proverb or way of saying is used. The Dutch proverb or way of saying are indicated in line 2 and 4 by means of the capital A and B. In line 2 the proverb A is used to say that people with equal rights have equal responsibilities. In line 4, B can be translated as "being on the same page". In both instances the ways of saying this are used in a denying manner.

Using proverbs is often done to emphasise or express general knowledge about a life experience. Hence one could argue that this shows that the organisation here represented by a board member knows of the general feeling that being called excellent and making a difference between teachers brings out emotions. They deliberately make the teachers uncomfortable. By using proverbs the speaker pulls what he is telling into a world of general knowledge and into a place in which everybody knows how things work. One could even say that it legitimises.

Using the proverbs or ways of saying in a denying manner expresses the belief by the organisation that not being equal or not being on the same page so doing something different from the majority is seen as an element belonging to the "excellente docent". It makes them stand out from the crowd.

4.6.4 Unit D

The hotspot (see Figure 18 on page V) is taken from a blog written by a participant in the professionalisation programme. The author is the principal and thus what is expressed in this section are the words and ideas of a participant. This makes the section significant because it holds the view of a participant, more so as we know that the section is taken from the unit that contains material from blogs. Blogs are generally known to consist of online personal reflections written in an informal or sometimes conversational style.

(1) Een van de middelen die het College van Bestuur inzet om de doelstelling *De Beste School van Nederland* te bereiken is het traject Excellente Docent.

(1) One of the means the board employs to reach the goal of Being the Best School in the Netherlands is through the program of the Excellent Teacher.

(2) Anderhalf jaar geleden ben ik in dit leertraject gestapt.

(2) A year and a half again I entered this learning path.

(3) De opzet kent 3 pijlers: kennis, reflectie en onderzoek.

(3) The design knows 3 pillars; knowledge, reflection and research

(4) Hoewel ik veel tijd in de excellente docent (ED) heb moeten stoppen (en nog steeds stop) zijn de opbrengsten voor mij waardevol.

(4) Although I have had to put a lot of time in the Excellente Docent (ED) (and still do) the proceeds are valuable to me.

(5) Omdat het vanzelfsprekend is dat ik mijn kennis met jullie deel

(5) Because it is needless to say that I share my knowledge with you.

Sentence number 1 shows that by account of the participant in the programme the board of the organisation uses the professionalisation program as an instrument to reach the main goal of the organisation. The program is “designed” (sentence 3) and enables participants to enter a “learning path” sentence 2. This identifies the idea that the being an excellent teacher is something that can be learned and because the learning path is along a programme that is designed it must somehow be possible to identify the elements needed to be or become excellent. Sentence 3 describes what the ingredients are: knowledge, reflection and research. A fourth element in the design to become an excellent teacher is brought in by the participant in sentence 4. This can best be described as the understanding that it asks a lot of time to participate in the programme and therefore it is an element of being an excellent teacher. This

is even enhanced by putting in brackets that it still requires an effort. This participant finds becoming and being an excellent teacher hard work. Only those who work hard become excellent. The last sentence also shows that with being an excellent teacher comes responsibilities. With being an excellent teacher comes the responsibility to share your knowledge with others. It makes the excellent teachers stand out from the crowd and is a way of distributing goods. It is clear what it takes to be an excellent teacher and what responsibilities come with it.

4.6.5 Unit E

Unit E is the largest single data source in the data corpus. It is a plain transcript of a recording made while assessors and participants were in a dialogue about the two year period the professionalisation programme had taken place. The goal of the conversation was to assess the participants. At the same time it was a conversation in which both assessor and participant reflected on the programme. This makes this data source significant.

In relation to getting under the surface, to get beyond the obvious in relation to what meaning is given to the programme and excellence in particular it is also a source of considerable significance. It brings together the institutional assumptions often through the voice of the assessor and that of the participant.

The first hotspot in unit E (see Figure 19 on page V) reads as presented next.

1	..want het gaat, zij zijn de high potentials in de klas	.. because it is about, they are the high potentials in class
1a	ja	Yes
2	en je wil dat ze een bijdrage leveren in het team	and you want them to contribute to the team
2a	ja	yes
3	naar de student	towards the students
3a	m,m	m,m
4	en voor de school en uiteindelijk voor OGT	And for the school and in the end for OGT
4a	ja	yes
5	Nou, ja, dat zie je aan haar terug maar dat zit met name in haar, zij wil heel goed zijn	Well,yes,, you can see it in her, that's really in her, she wants to be very good
5a	ja	yes

6	zij wil heel goed zijn	She wants to be very good
6a	en dan kom je bij dat johari	and it is here that you reach that johari
7	precies	exactly
7a	tuurlijk	'course
8	en ze wil het liefst ook nog een stapje beter zijn	And she would even prefer to be a little step better
8a	ja	yes
9	zodat ze, en dat ze zich daardoor zeker voelt	so she and that she thereby feels more self-assured
9a	ja	yes
10	en dat brengt haar enorm veel	And that brings here an enormous amount
10a	ja	yes
11	Eeh alleen wanneer maak je de stap omdat te doen, omdat je gewoon die drive voelt van ik wil dit goed doen voor die kinderen in plaats van ik wil dit goed doen omdat ik mezelf en mijn omgeving iets te bewijzen heb	Eeuh, only when do you make that step, just because you have the urge to do it well for the children instead of I want to do this well because I have to prove something to myself and my surroundings

In this section of text taken from a transcript of naturally occurring discourse the significance lies in the monologue one person holds about a participant in the professionalisation programme in relation to being good at something. The notion excellence is not used but the talk is about the participants' drive to be good or maybe competent at what it is the organisation asks her to do. The author of the section is not the principal of the text. The principals of the text are the two assessors who have a conversation. The person speaking the most is represented by the numerical lines (1-2-3-etc.). The reactions of the other person are represented by the other lines (1a-2a-3a-etc.).

To understand what is said it is important to know that this section is in a final phase of an assessing conversation between the participant and two members of the assessment committee of the excellent teacher program. The participant is not present at this time and although the notion excellence is not used the assessors are trying to identify where it is that the participant demonstrates excellence. In sentence 2 and 3 it becomes apparent that the assessors have identified that the participant contributes to the team and to the students and ultimately to the school and organisation. It is worth pointing out that the student is not the

first item mentioned and not the last but in the middle. Mentioning the team first shows this is the first area the assessor thinks of.

Sentence 5 and 6 clearly express that the assessors connect to the way they have seen the participant wanting to be good or even very good. In sentence 8 the assessors identify that good is not good enough. The participant has shown the assessors the motivation to keep improving. One can say that it is here that a connection of being excellent to constant improving can be found.

Line 10 and 11 shows an interesting tension on the continuous striving to do better with an aim on the individual or outside the individual. The striving to do better is set to bring the individual enormous benefit; however, exactly what this benefit is remains unexplained. Line 11 makes the enormous amount more important when the striving to improve is related to an urge to do this comes from within and the added value is related to the development of children instead of an importance related to perception for the outside world. This links to the individualism from a neo-liberalistic perspective in which a personal asset serves the entrepreneurial self (being an excellent teacher) and is no longer relevant to the outside world.

This can also be found in the next sample (see Figure 20 on page VI) taken from unit E where the principal is a participant in the professionalisation program talking about the transfer of new knowledge gained during the program to the professional context of the participant.

(1)en eeuhn vanuit het hele stuk differentiëren eeuh alles wat wij zeg maar leerde bij de excellente

(1) and eeuh from the whole piece differentiate eeuh everything we say but learned during the excellent

(2)docent koppelen wij gewoon terug naar het team in ieder geval de belangrijkste dingen natuurlijk

(2) teacher we just link back to the team at least the most important things of course

(3)en ja hoorden ze dus op een gegeven moment ook over dat differentiëren en eeuh toen heb ik

(3) and yes, so at some point they also heard about differentiation and then uh I

(4)inderdaad een lesbezoek gekoppeld aan het stukje differentiëren bij haar in de les

(4) indeed a visit to a lesson linked to the piece of differentiating in her class

Discernible in line (2) is that the participant communicates that what is learned about differentiation is transferred back to the team. The participant is not talking about the way

everything learned about differentiation is used in teaching situations of the participant but about the transfer of the gained knowledge to other teachers. This relates the excellent teacher to teacher professionalisation. The knowledge gained becomes a commodity and is used to increase team knowledge on differentiation.

In line (4) this is to be found again when the participant talks about the role she had in visiting other teachers' lessons in order to learn through collegial consultation.

In the next hotspot (see Figure 21 on page VI) there are two people in dialogue. P is the participant who is in conversation with A, the assessor in the professionalisation program. This passage is significant because it is one of the few passages in which the word excellence is actually discussed. Already established from previous analysing rounds is that the assessor can be seen as a voice for the organisation. The principal thus is the organisation.

(1)P ja ik snap dat heel goed maar dat is wel telkens de vraag die wel eeuh mijn hersenen malen constant natuurlijk en als je het inderdaad hebt over een excellente docent, ik had het er daarstraks nog over inderdaad in de tuinkamer met de groep ja wat is dat nou een excellente docent weet je wel en x zij toen heel mooi je bent een excellerende docent en dus ben je een excellente docent omdat je aan het excelleren bent ik dacht noch die is nou mooi weggezet x had ik die maar eerder gehoord

(1)P yes I understand that very well but that is always the question that euh my brain is constantly grinding of course and if you are indeed talking about an excellent teacher, I was talking about it indeed in the garden room with the group yes what is that well you know an excellent teacher and x was expressing very beautifully when you are an excellent teacher and so you are an excellent teacher because you are excelling I thought this was well put by x I wish I had heard that before

(2)A ja

(2)A yes

(3)P ja en plezier

(3)P yes and pleasure

(4)A ja

(4)A yes

(5)A en passie

(5)A and passion

(6)P ja

(6)P yes

(7)A want dat lees ik ook bij jou en

(7)A because I also read that with you and

(8)P ja

(8)P yes

(9)A ik denk dat je dat je je daar heel erg aan vast moet grijpen Y

(9)A I think you should really get a hold of that Y

(10)P m m

(10)P m m

(11)A nog meer daar waar het frustreert dat jij het woordje plezier

(11)A even more where it frustrates you to have to pull the word pleasure

(12)P ja

(12)P yes

(13)A even uit de kast weer trekt want dat is dan even weg van hoe zorg ik er voor

(13)A out of the cupboard again, because that makes me come back to

(14)A dat ik dat plezier

(14)A that I take that I take pleasure

(15)P ja

(15)P yes

(16)A en misschien wordt je dan wat onverschilliger en wat laconieker ook in de dingen die je tegen

(16)A and maybe you will become a little indifferent and a bit laconic about the things you find

(17)P ja

(17)P yes

(18)P vallen ja

(18)P disappointing yes

(20)A die die

(20)A that that

(21)P ja misschien wel

(21)P yes maybe so

(22)A die weerstand mocht je tegenkomen

(22)A that resistance you might meet

(23)P ja ja

(23)P yes yes

(24)A want he ja ja jij in principe je bent ben je een voorbeeld met alles wat je uitprobeert en eeuh

(24)A because hey yes yes you are basically you are an example with everything that you try and eh

(25)P m

(25)P m

(26)A hoe hoe gedegen en contentieus en eeuh eeuh ja voortvarend jij dingen aanpakt en uitzoekt en uitprobeert

(26)A how how thorough and controversial and euh euh yes energetically you tackle things and sort them out and try them out

(27)P ja

(27)P yes

(28)A en daar en daar haal jij ook plezier uit

(28)A and there and there you get pleasure from it

(29)P ja daar haal ik zeker plezier uit

(29)P yes, I certainly get pleasure from that

(30)A en dat niet iedereen vervolgens achter jou aan wil gaan

(30)A and that not everyone wants to go after you

(31)P ja dat dat moet ik ook gewoon eeuh loslaten

(31)P I just have to let that go

(32)A maar ook in je nieuwe rol

(32)A but also in your new role

(33)P ja

(33)P yes

(34)A ja

(34)A yes

(35)A ook in je nieuwe rol en voor je zelf er tevreden mee zijn dat je zegt ik investeer in die tachtig procent of die 60 procent die wel mee wil

(35)A also in your new role and before you yourself are satisfied that you say I invest in the eighty percent or the 60 percent who do want to come along

(36)P ja

(36)P yes

The passage begins (1) when the conversation turns to the notion excellence. The participant as can be found under 1 shows that even up to the last moment of the professionalisation program she does not know what it means to be excellent or what it is that makes a teacher excellent. Interesting here is that in what she relays we get a glimpse of what is said out of view because she gives a description of what is being said by another participant when they were discussing what excellence should mean. **“, I was talking about it indeed in the garden room with the group yes what is that well you know an excellent teacher”** shows that the other participants also are still wondering what excellence means. One participant attempts to provide a meaning to being called an excellent teacher: **“x was expressing very beautifully when you are an excellent teacher and so you are an excellent teacher because you are excelling”**. This is not very clear: it does show that being an excellent teacher is about doing something **“you are excelling”**. For the participant it was on the other hand very clear: **“ I thought this was well put by x I wish I had heard that before”**. It appears to relate to a meaning discussed earlier and not present in the data corpus.

For the assessor in this passage we can also find a meaning given to the notion of excellence. After the passage above the assessor connects to this with the following moderators: pleasure and passion. Being an excellent teacher should consist of pleasure and passion. These are what Gee calls perspectives on social goods (see 2.4 Finding a meaning of excellence: from literature to methodology on page 30).

Lines 22 and 24 are significant because they provide an insight into how the assessor connects the moderators to activities the excellent teacher conducts. The assessor links pleasure as an element of being excellent to an element to return to when resistance is met when the excellent teacher is an example (you in line 24) in everything the excellent teacher does.

The excellent teacher is being an example to other teachers here. This can be found in line 30. Everybody wants to go after you, everybody here being other teachers. The assessor further links this to a new role the excellent teacher is to have. This can be linked to the role of being an example to other teachers in leading the way. This relates to the role the excellent teacher has in activities related to teacher professionalisation.

What it means to be assessed as an excellent teacher for the participants also emerges from the following hotspot (see Figure 22 on page VII). In this passage a participant is talking about what it means to be assessed as an excellent teacher or in the case of not being assessed but having participated in the program. What should be noted is that Dutch is not the participant's first language but the words spoken are to be rated as belonging to a principal so reflect the participant's view and are taken as such even though the language is not grammatically correct. The meaning is situated as it belongs to the professionalisation program and the moment of assessing during the course of this conversation.

The discourse reads (with a correction of A capital letter at the front and a full stop at the end as):

Ik denk dat ik als excellente docent straks als stempeltje krijg (als ik stempeltje niet krijg ook maakt niet uit) dat ik mijn collega kan meenemen in wat ik geleerd heb en probeer iets mee te geven en ook te laten denken dat anders kan omdat ik zie ook die jonge collega van mij dat eigenlijk heel klassikaal frontaal les geven er is niks mis mee als de klas meegaat maar ik heb wel gezien dat het anders kan en leuker kan.

In translation this reads as:

I think that as an excellent teacher I will soon get a stamp (if I do not receive a stamp, it does not matter) that I can take my colleague into what I have learned and try to give something to it and also to think that I can do it differently because I see also that young colleague of mine that actually teaches in a very frontal classroom there is nothing wrong with it if the class goes along but I have seen that things can be done differently and more fun.

What is interesting to see here is that the participant uses the words "get a stamp" as it is about being assessed as an excellent teacher. This reflects getting a stamp of approval. That

this is next linked to a role the participant can have next in coaching other colleagues shows the participant holds value in being called an excellent teacher.

The participant connects being called or assessed an excellent teacher with having specific knowledge that might hold value for others. The participant links this in the same utterance with stating that “there is nothing wrong with a very frontal classroom” shows connection to what has been taught in the program about new insights in teaching but that there also lies value in what an experienced teacher knows will work. The standard for the participant here is the observation if a class goes along with the teaching style or not.

Next of interest (see Figure 23 on page VII) is a conversation between the assessor and another participant. It reveals further meaning given to excellence in the excellent teacher program.

In this passage the assessor is expressing the principal’s voice that is the organisation’s,

(1)A eeuh als je terug kijkt op die periode van twee jaar he dan gaat het traject excellente docent gaat ook ook over coaching coaching van jezelf eeuhm maar met name ook coaching van collega’s na is dat voor iemand die heel blauw is kan dat of heel gemakkelijk zijn of is dat een hele grote uitdaging eeuhm hoe zit dat voor jou?

(1)A eeuh if you look back on that period of two years hey then the route excellent teacher is also about coaching coaching of yourself eeuhm but especially coaching of colleagues is that for someone who is very blue that can be very easy or is that a very big challenge euhm how about that for you?

(2)P nou als het gaat om het coachen procesmatig begeleiden afspraken inplannen dat gaat volgens mij wel prima

(2)P well when it comes to coaching process-based scheduling appointments I think that's fine

(3)A ja appeltje eitje he

(3)A yes very easy hey

(4)P het appeltje eitje alleen als het dan gaat om eeuh collega aanspreken op als ze dan iets niet gedaan hebben

(4)P the very easy only when it comes to talking to a colleague if they have not done something

In the first line the assessor takes the participant back to what the professionalisation program has been about. Significant here is “**the route excellent teacher is also about coaching coaching of yourself eeuhm but especially coaching of colleagues**”. In this statement the

assessor connects being an excellent teacher to coaching yourself but even more so coaching colleagues. In line 2 coaching of colleagues is explained as a process-based activity. The use of the word process-based activity in relation to teacher training brings it into a world where teacher training can be seen as a system of following a standard process that will lead to coaching teachers.

The assessor reacts to this with **“yes, very easy hey”**. By using these words the assessor communicates that the coaching of colleagues as a process-based phenomenon is seen as the way to go. As the assessor is expressing the views of the organisation the above perspective on coaching colleagues is the organisational view as well.

The following hotspot (see Figure 24 on page VIII) where the notion excellence is actually used in the conversation between a participant and assessor the coaching role to colleagues comes across as well.

(1)ik denk dat ik als excellente docent straks als stempeltje krijg (als ik stempeltje niet krijg ook maakt (2)niet uit) dat ik mijn collega kan meenemen en in wat ik geleerd heb en probeer iets mee te geven (3)en ook te laten denken dat anders kan omdat ik zie ook die jonge collega van mij dat eigenlijk heel (4)klassikaal frontaal les geven en is niks mis mee als de klas meegaat maar ik heb wel gezien dat het (5)anders kan en leuker kan

(1) I think that as an excellent teacher I will soon get a stamp (if I don't get a stamp too (2) it doesn't matter) that I can take my colleague with me and into what I have learned and try to give something (3) and also to think that it can be done differently because I also see that young colleague of mine actually teaches very (4) classroom frontally and there is nothing wrong with that if the class goes along but I have seen that (5) can be different and more fun

The participant is the principal in this section. It shows by the use of the use of “get a stamp” and “take my colleague with me” that an excellent teacher can be an ambassador of what has been learned and is an example to others in other ways of teaching. The knowledge gained is to be used to let others learn.

In another hotspot from this unit (see Figure 25 on page VIII) are words spoken by the assessor at the end of the conversations with the participants. In the passage the assessor who is the principal here as well goes into what it is that makes the excellent teacher excellent.

(1)diezelfde schwung diezelfde flexibiliteit die zouden wij ook graag dat hele team gunnen en eigenlijk

(1)that same schwung (dynamic manner) that same flexibility that we would also like to give the whole team

(2)ben je ze ertoe aan het verleiden en aan de andere kant zien we daar verzetten ze zich tegen en

(2) and you are actually tempting them and on the other hand we see that they

(3)dat verzet wordt een beetje gehonoreerd en dat vinden we jammer want eeuh ik denk als

(3)resist and that resistance is a bit honoured and we think that's a shame because eeuh I think as an

(4)excellente docent die doet dat op die manier die neemt ook dat team mee en daar dat doe je

(4)excellent teacher who does it that way, that team also takes it along and you do it

(5)hartstikke goed

(5)very well there

The assessor communicates in this section what the attributes are that make an excellent teacher, excellent: **“that same swung that same flexibility”**. Through the use of these words it connects to what has earlier been detected in a hotspot on what it is that makes a teacher excellent, namely being inspiring. Furthermore the excellent teacher should be a leading example to others is what can be found in the next from end line 3 and line 4: **“I think as an excellent teacher who does it that way, that team also takes it along”**.

In the last hotspot can also be found that being an excellent teacher means being an example to others and improve education through mutual learning (see Figure 26 on page IX) .

(1)A als je nou zegt dit heb ik geleerd in het excellentie traject en pas ik toe om het onderwijs

(1) A if you say this is what I learned in the excellence trajectory and I apply this to make education

(2)bij ons beter te maken wat zijn dan de eerste dingen die je te binnen schiet

(2) better with us than the first things that come to mind is?

(3)P bij mij collegiale consultatie echt ik kan er niks aan doen maar ik geloof daar heilig in (NAME)

(3) P peer consultation really I can do nothing about it but I firmly believe in this (NAME)

When, in line 1, the participant is asked by the assessor what the most important element is that the participant has learned during the program, the participant is adamant in line 3 about the fact that peer review is the most important element. When asked what is applied to work

on a day to day basis the same answer that peer review is the most important element is given.

This can be seen as important because it communicates that what is learned during the program can be seen as skill or commodity that can be used to improve education through teacher professionalisation. What has been learned by the individual is transformed into an economical commodity and used for the continuous improvement of education.

With presenting the findings from the last unit the end of this chapter has been reached. The next step is to consider the implication of the findings in relation to the literature. The next chapter will discuss the findings from this chapter.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This research project has set out to find what meaning is given to the notion excellence as used in a name given to a professionalisation program for VET college in the Netherlands. A data corpus containing texts from the period the professionalisation program was active has been examined from a constructionist perspective by employing a discourse analytical approach. In the previous chapters the approach and findings of this qualitative single case study was presented in detail. This chapter will go into how the findings build on the ideas in the literature. Next is a summary of what is to follow in this chapter.

First the obvious and less obvious meaning given to excellence from a perspective on and by the individual teacher is discussed. In this section the discussion concerns the findings that at a first glance denote that excellence in relation to a teacher is about improving the daily professional practice in relation to educating pupils and students. It relates to gaining, developing or improving knowledge and skills. When taking a more detailed look into the data this obvious finding can be seen from a different perspective as it also seems to be about improving the individual and adding value to the individual professional in the sense of his or her standing and relation to colleagues.

Next the obvious and less obvious meaning given to excellence from an organisational perspective and that from a teachers' perspective are delineated. At the surface this is primarily about placing the pupils or student at the centre of the added value to education and teaching when striving for an excellent teacher. When looking more deeply into what is going on it seems to be that the added value of striving for excellence in teachers is much more about improving the educational organisation with only an indirect effect on what is happening in the classroom. Finally the discussion will be about whether there is a universal meaning to be given to excellence as used in the case study's context.

The discussion builds and underpins the unfolding argument that having a professionalisation program for further development named the excellent teacher is about working towards organisational improvement instead of improving a teacher's own practice or teaching excellence. Taking a critical stance, my argument is that having a professionalisation program aimed at forming excellent teachers objectifies the teaching profession. In other words teachers evolve from being individuals with a certain autonomy aimed at the individual's teaching context to individuals with skills that are recognisable by standardisation of skills. Excellence here holds a meaning linked to quality. It provides a word with which to distinguish

variations in quality. From an organisation point of view teachers become individuals with a standardised set of skills and can be put to use where they are needed. From this perspective excellence holds a more economic based meaning.

5.2 Meaning of excellence and the individual teacher

A first line of examining the findings relates to the meaning of excellence in relation to the individual teacher participating in the professionalisation program. Meaning given to excellence is about improving the daily professional practice in relation to educating pupils and students.

The individual teacher participating in the “Excellent Teacher” professionalisation program is impelled to further develop his or her profession as a teacher. This is illustrated by what can be found in Unit B of the data corpus (see 4.6.2 Unit B on page 92). In unit B it is apparent that the sole reason for a participant to enrol in the program is to improve the teaching process in the classroom. The participant in question’s reaction to this aim of the program is that there has never been another ambition for this individual to participate in the programme. This demonstrates the participant’s strong motivation to improve his or her practice with a primary focus on improving education for students, which is also limited to his or her own teaching environment.

Participating in the program is not simply about enrolling. To be allowed to start the program several activities must be undertaken such as presenting oneself and having an endorsement from a line manager. Once in the programme the aim is to become an excellent teacher in the form of an entrepreneurial, inquiring and inspiring professional who acts in an effective, investigative and authentic manner. Data analysed from Unit B shows that developing teachers along these lines produces teachers who can really make a difference. Furthermore it is the development of such characteristics that is needed in order to provide the best education for the pupils and students. This focus on developing skills and gaining knowledge is another element belonging to meaning of excellence in relation to the individual.

There is tension here between what can be found in the literature on teaching excellence and the excellent teacher when related to initiatives about finding the best teacher in a country or school. Excellence related only to a talent or ability present in an individual is an approach taken by a number of scholars (Beishuizen et al., 2001; Feldman, 1996; Rescher, 2015; Schon, 1984); others (Barzun and Philipson, 1991; Little et al., 2007) explain excellence as reached through motivation, effort and as such can be gained. Biesta (2015) explains excellence as a level to be attained on a ranking scale of quality. This then is about providing a platform for

talented or outstanding individuals. In higher education and programs related to student excellence across the globe (Little et al., 2007) an analogue can be found. These so-called honours programs focus on talented individuals and provide a platform for them. Excellence in these instances means to be the best at something or at least very good - a talent being already present in an individual but needing to be cultivated into something more. The teacher professionalisation program under investigation in this research project contains an inner tension in the sense that on the one hand it wants the already talented teachers to enrol in the programme and at the same time the programme is aimed at developing skills and knowledge. Thus the programme is both for teachers who are not yet excellent and are willing to develop their skills while on the other hand it is a programme for teachers who already show signs of excellence or are already excellent in the sense that he or she owns non-explicit talents.

The combination of talent and developing skills through hard work is present in the data on (see 4.6.4 Unit D on page 98) excellent teachers for the professionalisation program. In the literature review this combination is not found. Either it is excellence in a person related to pre-existing inner talent or excellence obtained through effort and hard work as Rescher (2015) has argued.

When excellence is something that can be gained and does not come as a talent as apparent in the findings from the data in Unit A (see 4.6.1 Unit A on page 82), it becomes a commodity as Little et al. (2007) have already expressed. Taking the perspective of looking at excellence in teachers as a commodity paves the way to thinking about what an organisation needs to provide for this commodity. A professionalisation program can then be seen as a factory for making excellent teachers as described by Rose (1993). It is about improving individuals for a greater corporate good.

More implicit in the data, meaning is given to excellence that emphasises improving individuals' skills and improving the individual in the sense of enhancing the value of an individual's professional role. It is interesting from this point of view that this focus on the individual coincides with a present social and economic focus on improving the individual at a time widely referred to as the neo-liberalistic era (Harris and Biesta, 2017). The improving of the individual self through study or professionalisation programs for example is aimed at adding value.

The notion of adding value to the individual can be related to the individual self or at something or someone else but is always about adding value through the individual. In this light, being or becoming an excellent teacher contains a meaning in relation to adding value. Being an excellent teacher in this case harbours an economic meaning. At one point in the

discourse (see 4.6.5 Unit E on page 99) excellence holding a meaning of developing talent and excellence holding an economic meaning seem to come together in one participant's conversation with an assessor which is reflected on the professionalisation program. The participant explains that what has been learned in relation to teaching skills is related back to teams in the schools. The skills and knowledge hereby become a commodity that is related back to others. It is not only valuable for the individual but becomes of value to a team of teachers. The participant is aware of the value of developing professional talents and this is recognised by the assessors at that time. It is at this point in the discourse that meaning as added value of the individual's talents (Excellence) for a team or school is expressed: excellence is no longer about developing talents but about in what way a talented individual (excellent teacher) holds an economic value. This shows in the data from Unit A where the assessment matrix makes it clear that all participants in the program at least come out as sufficiently excellent. The organisation needs the excellent teacher to continuously improve and develop the organisation to maintain an economically healthy position. This finding is an example of what Ball (2016) has expressed on the mechanisms of neoliberalism being nowadays not only present in policies but also present in individuals. To be more specific, individual participants have an inner drive to keep improving. For more also see 2.3.7" Excellence in education in a neo-liberalistic age of quality", on page 27.

The outcomes of the teacher professionalisation program are not only being of value to the individual participating in the program. The shift described above positions the individual as having value to the organisation as well. The participant in the program, namely the excellent teacher, becomes the source of knowledge and skills to go to for others in the teaching team. It alters the standing of the individual and positions the teacher as an ambassador for excellent teaching. This builds on what was explored earlier in the literature review in relation to excellence not meaning equality.

From the research project and its findings as described in the previous chapter, being an ambassador is not perceived from a qualitative stance in the sense of being better than the other. It is more about having learned and developed new skills and knowledge which can be used to aid colleagues in the sense that they can learn from the excellent teacher.

When examining the findings from the individual's perspective it becomes possible to argue that on a scale from obvious and on the surface to less obvious and more under the surface the meaning of excellence has always had a connection to improving skills and knowledge. This shows through the assessment matrix (see 4.6.1 Unit A from page 82) used in which the excellent teacher is assessed against the items of being inspiring, inquisitive and being

entrepreneurial. More clearly even this becomes apparent from the words used by a teacher that the thought was that participating in the program was about improving teaching. The aim of being excellent as a teacher goes from improving participants' daily professional practice in relation to better education for students and pupils to improving the skills of the individual to enhance the value of the individual's professional role. This becomes apparent in the situation where meaning is given to excellence by a participant in the programme aimed at becoming better at being a teacher (see 4.6.2 Unit B on page 92). All elements of being considered excellent were primarily aimed at making a difference for the students. The individual wanted to gain more knowledge about teaching and learn about new innovations to become a better teacher. The individual wanted to further develop as a teaching professional and be inspiring in the sense that as a teacher he or she makes a difference for pupils and becomes locked in their memory of their schooldays.

Next it could be argued that it is about changing the relation the individual holds with regards to its peers. In other words altering the standing of the individual as a colleague to a role model or source of skills and knowledge to be tapped. The relation of being excellent as a teacher to the professionalisation of teams and in this sense linking the meaning given to excellence to organisational development is expressed by a number of participants in the data from unit D (See 4.6.4 Unit D from page 98). This meaning resonates from a deeper level of the discourse than from the surface as shown by the fact that the participants only relate to this when the dialogue is turned towards being an ambassador for excellence in teaching by an assessor but was also expressed by the management of the organisation (see 4.6.2 Unit B from page 92). As both an assessor as a member of the management of the organisation express the importance of sharing the gained knowledge by the excellent teachers shows that it is important for the organisation to pass on knowledge. This connects to what has been found in the literature on excellence in education in relation to the neo liberal principle of turning individual skills and knowledge into a commodity and making use of it from an economic perspective (see 2.3.7 Excellence in education in a neo-liberalistic age of quality. From page 26).

However there is more. Examination of the findings indicates that the professionalisation program is not only about improving the skills and knowledge of an individual. It is also about improving education in a larger context than that of the individual teacher's classroom. Common knowledge is that teachers are part of a team, educational teams combined form schools and a cluster of schools becomes an educational organisation. Hence it becomes important to discuss the meaning of excellence in relation to educational organisations as well. This will be expounded in the following section.

5.3 Meaning of excellence and the educational organisation

From an organisational perspective looking at education the question becomes how to organise a school or at a large scale the educational sector to facilitate the learning and developing of pupils and students. This can be examined from a national perspective but also from a local or school's perspective. It might even be argued that both go hand in hand.

The "Excellent Teacher" as part of the research project is undeniably connected to the educational organisation. In this section the obvious meaning of excellence in relation to a teacher and the educational organisation is discussed as well as the less obvious meaning. This will build the argument that although it might appear that having an excellent teacher is aimed at placing the student or pupil at the centre of attention, it is about putting the educational organisation at the centre of attention.

As already explained in the introduction of this research report the "Excellent Teacher" as a professionalisation program has been initiated by an educational organisation. Via the programme the organisation aims at improving the educational skills and knowledge of individual teachers as becomes clear from the findings in unit A. When going through three moderators ascribed to an excellent teacher of being entrepreneurial, inquiring and inspiring (see 4.6.1 Unit A from page 82) at first reading these are aimed at outcomes related to pupils. The use of notions such as change processes and vision development pull the programme from being aimed at individuals towards the educational organisation.

Elements attributed to the excellent teacher gain value the moment the element can be assessed. To assess a matrix with variables a scale is often used. Plainly visible in the data was the use of such a matrix (see 4.6.1 Unit A from page 82) with which to assess the individuals in the programme against the elements attributed to being excellent.

Having an assessment matrix means having a standard set of items against, which in this case, an individual can be compared. An individual can then be linked to items previously determined to indicate excellence. In the situation present in the research project the matrix found in the data and described in the findings (see 4.6.1 Unit A from page 82) might arguably be the standard for an excellent teacher within the inquired context of the VET college.

At the surface and at a quick glance this holds a meaning given to excellence. A closer inspection rapidly reveals that there are gradations within being excellent as the findings show. Looking closer at this nuance given to the meaning of excellence, it becomes apparent that under the surface it conveys more in relation to what is meant by being an excellent

teacher. To explore this further it is necessary to focus on the practice of standardisation in relation to attributing value to an individual by naming them excellent.

Having standards provides the possibility of making an assessment. It makes it possible to compare skills and abilities and attribute a value to them that is recognisable from the result that it relates to standards that are generally considered to be the norm. The value the skills and abilities have within a context have the same value outside the context when the standard is agreed upon. In relation to the research project it becomes possible to state that the excellent teacher no longer is considered excellent in the sense that the individual is known but becomes “Excellente” outside the context where the individual is not known but the standards against which the individual is assessed are agreed upon.

Furthermore having standards for excellence helps to render transparent what moderators and skills or abilities are related to being excellent. Thus it becomes possible to develop oneself towards being excellent. For an organisation it then also becomes possible to make use of the standards to develop the individuals within an organisation against the set of standards. From an organisational perspective it becomes a governing tool to use in relation to attaining the organisational goals. From an organisational perspective the individual can be used as a technical element in the process of organisational development. An individual can be placed there where the skills and abilities present in the individual are needed by the organisation.

As all the above is based in a set of standards, the value of the individual is widely recognised and the individual becomes a commodity. It can be used where it is needed. One might even argue that the individual becomes an object within a broader system aimed at progress as analysed in the literature chapter (see 2.3.7 Excellence in education in a neo-liberalistic age of quality from page 26).

In Unit B it can be discerned that a participant in the programme expresses surprise when finding out that content of the knowledge line in the programme was mainly about organisational and educational management while the participant’s idea was that the programme was about teaching. This participant was quick to discover that on the surface the professionalisation programme was about improving teaching by the individual teacher aimed at improving the professional’s practice with the student or pupil in mind. Under the surface the professionalisation programme was only indirectly aimed at the student; at a more abstract scale than that of the individual’s classroom the programme was primarily aimed at improving the educational organisation.

In Unit E the connection of the excellent teacher to improving the educational organisations is also discernible. At several points in Unit E it can be found that the role of an excellent teacher

is that of coach to colleagues or being the critical friend for a headteacher. The outcomes of the professionalisation programme are to be used to improve the educational practice at the level of the educational organisation, either at the level of a team or school where a participant finds his or her initial place of work, or at the level of the VET college that has initiated the professionalisation programme.

Using the improvement of an educational organisation serves a purpose in relation to market forces in the field of education (see 2.3.3 Excellence meaning funding on page 14) . Measuring the performance of education against the result of its outcomes in economic terms is important. In a system of constant comparison of schools and even educational systems in striving for the best possible ranking on a local national or even global scale this performative element of education is important.

The professionalisation program in this research project lies at the heart of this process of continuous improvement. It provides tools, skills and knowledge for teachers to examine and thereby improve their own practice with an ultimate aim at becoming excellent at what they do.

In the light of the global focus on continuous improvement and quality in education (Ball, 2009; Biesta, 2015; Harris and Biesta, 2017; Morley, 2003) the professionalisation program in the VET college under inquiry in this research project is nothing new. It is interesting to see that in all the data sources examined no mention is made of this process of continuously improving education with a focus on quality. The professionalisation program is presented as a means for individual teachers to improve their teaching and work towards excellence in teaching.

Although it is clear when excellence has been reached from an individual's point of view the data examined does not indicate when, from an organisational point of view, excellence has been reached. Perhaps this can best be explained by referring to the words spoken by one of the participants when asked about the notion of excellence (4.6.2 Unit B on page 92). Being excellent is not something to be or become as a finite point but is a process and as such excellence will never be reached. Taking this thought and applying it on an organisational context that wishes to stand for the best education in the Netherlands it is possible to argue that this is never going to be reached. Being the best or excellent today means that it can be better again tomorrow and the whole process of change begins again, hence the strong connection between striving for excellence and the focus on continuous improvement.

At the beginning of chapter three the VET college has been introduced including the fact that the organisation works with a collective ambition. This collective ambition is also mentioned in

a number of data sources. Central to the collective ambition is that the VET college wants to stand for "The best education in the Netherlands". The collective ambition of the VET college must give direction to everything that happens within the organisation. It is the compass that indicates in which direction to go when new questions or challenges arise. In 2012, the formulation of this ambition put a dot on the horizon for the VET college to work towards.

"The best education in the Netherlands" has no clear meaning. The meaning comes when "the best" is used in relation to something else. By reading the full text of the ambition it becomes clear in more detail in relation to how "the best" should be read. This will also make it clearer what is meant by "The best education".

The indications in the text of the collective ambition to find the meaning of "the best education" are as follows:

- Skilled and proud colleagues who make the difference
- from one's own strength
- by sustainably improving education.

The concept of continuous improvement is part of an organisational improvement culture based on a shared responsibility throughout the organisation to commit and account for improvements. By opting for continuous improvement, one immediately opts for a system of quality thinking and quality culture. Furthermore, joint improvement of the organisation requires working with standards that are the same for everyone. If not it will be difficult to measure continuous improvement and therefore quality. Because the VET's college ambition is formulated as the best education in the Netherlands, it makes sense to look for standards at the national level. For the VET college in this case study these national standards can be retrieved from data taken from a national VET benchmark.

The indication "skilled and proud colleagues who make the difference" brings the search for the meaning of "the best" within the domain of the quality of the educational professional. This ties in to the exploration in the literature reviews of ways of controlling or governing the quality of education (see 2.3.7 Excellence in education in a neo-liberalistic age of quality from page 26). Unfortunately, it does not become clearer than what it says, and it remains a question of how "competent" should be understood. Has it to do with subject-specific competence or educational competence? Furthermore in terms of "making a difference" does that have to do with being an inspiring and enthusiastic educational professional or being able to differentiate or be better than someone else? What is becoming clear is that "making a difference" as an education professional is at odds with the concept of continuous

improvement in which working according to standards is no longer about individual professional responsibility but collective responsibility.

The last element is taken from the collective ambition "from my own strength", namely, the best education in the Netherlands is shaped by the strength from within the organisation. The question is to what extent there is also room for one's own strength based on the other indications outlined above. If education is to be continuously improved and draws upon national benchmark data in this regard, there is less and less self-autonomy (Harris and Biesta, 2017). Quality thinking and continuous improvement thus strengthen remote steering by a government (Rose, 1993, 1991) where the proceeds of education must contribute to national interests. It seems a more subtle way of having an influence on choices made within educational organisations that relate to improvements than when this done by giving a direct order to do so. This does also give the impression that there is an institutional interest. This means that there is no further question of personal strength or individual autonomy related to continuous improvement of the organisation. Organisation tasks are set at another level aimed at helping the steering from a distance either by management within an organisation or national governments.

This builds on what already has been presented by Rose (1993) and Ball (2015) in relation to the importance of the focus on performance and has been explained from a Dutch educational perspective by Harris and Biesta (2017). The findings from the data show that this system of focus on performance in order to compete for students with other schools in the region is now present in a decentralised and very local system of a VET college (see for example page 82). The literature review earlier explained that it was already present at a national and global scale (see 2.3.6 "What excellence means in Dutch educational policies" from page 20) and global (see 2.3.7 "Excellence in education in a neo-liberalistic age of quality" from page 26) scale.

This not only makes it difficult to give more concrete clarity to what the best education in the Netherlands is, it also indicates that there is a great deal of tension regarding what an institution can interpret as the best education in the Netherlands. What can be argued is that autonomy of the educational professional can survive if the best education in the Netherlands is explained along the line of continuous improvement. Being the best means wanting to stand out from the crowd. Focusing on continuously improving makes it possible for educational contexts to do so as with continuously improving comes the use of standards to compare quality (see 2.3.1 Excellence meaning continuous improving From page 9). This observation moves the discussion into the domain of quality control and quality assurance, a domain that

can be seen as a positivistic domain in which the quality of education is based on only objective truths that can be measured normatively.

One could argue that the formulated collective ambition is too one-sided. After all, learning is easier to measure along centrally set learning objectives. In this way, learning becomes a countable product because of the educational process. However, education is more than that. The three-fold aim of education as argued by Biesta (2006, 2015) is clear about this.

5.4 Meaning or purpose

What the discussion so far has shown is that the notion excellence in relation to a teacher as in an excellent teacher remains altogether unclear. At the surface it seems to be about being a talented individual teacher who through hard work wants to develop skills and augment knowledge on teaching. Beneath the surface it seems to be about improving education from an organisational point of view aimed at being the best educational organisation in a region or even country. Maybe the discussion should not be about what meaning is given to the notion but about in what manner it serves a purpose.

For individuals participating in the program being an excellent teacher or making a start with the professionalisation program is meaningful for their professional development. From unit A and B, it becomes clear that this is not so much about being called excellent as it is about improving personal teaching skills in order to provide better education for the pupils and students. The purpose of being an excellent teacher is to be recognisable to others as having knowledge and expertise. To become excellent a teacher has to go through the professionalisation program as this holds the standards set for excellence opposed to this once being clear from professional standards.

For the organisation the professionalisation program serves a purpose from an organisational development perspective. It is a way to reach the organisational goals set out and to reach the organisation's ambition in providing the best education in the Netherlands.

Having a professionalisation program for further professional development can thus be discussed as a means to reach individual as well as organisational goals. The VET college in this research project champions the professionalisation program to improve and develop educational aspects from the level of the classroom to an organisational level with a direct economical perspective in being the best education in the country and therefore securing a position in the future.

The next chapter will look back at the completed research project. The research questions will be addressed and a limitation of the research project articulated. The practical use and purpose of the research will also be addressed in this final chapter.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study set out to find the meaning given to the word excellence used in a professionalisation programme for teachers. It is worth pointing out that the outcome is that meaning has been found but that it does not class as ground-breaking. It might come across as rather obvious but what turned out to be more innovative was the usefulness of the research approach used.

In this sixth and final chapter the research questions will be addressed and conclusions drawn. Attention will also be paid to the appropriateness of the approach with which the research project was carried out. This chapter ends with suggestions for further research and practice.

This research project aimed to find answers to the research question as formulated at the beginning of chapter one:

What meaning is given to the notion of excellence in the context of a specific professionalisation program in a Dutch VET college?

This question is broken up into:

- 1 What meanings are apparent in policies and published academic literature?
- 2 What meanings are given by the different actors in this context: a) teachers; b) assessors; c) management?

6.2 Addressing the questions

The study has identified that in relation to the main question on what meaning is given to the notion of excellence there is no unique answer. It is possible though to address the research question when focussing on the surface and deeper level findings. As the research project shows at the surface of the discourse around excellence there is way of addressing this question in relation to providing a gradation in quality attributed to participants who have finished the professionalisation programme. At the same time deeper in the discourse there are more economic meanings to be found that make addressing the research question a process of placing it in the organisational aspects of education and its dependency on funding when this is directly linked to the quality of the education. It depends on the perspective from which the question is viewed. From this observation it is more interesting to answer the break-up of the central question.

Using the break-up of the central question the observation is made that meaning given to the notion by assessors and or trainers has not been found as such. The assessors or trainers are present in the data but have not been identified as having the principal voice. They appear to express the meaning of the management. This leaves only the perspectives of the participant and management to consider when addressing the research question.

When doing this it might even be possible to place the perspectives in a matrix to provide an easier overview.

Perspective	Surface	Depth
Excellent teacher (participant)	Excellent means being good in teaching aimed at improving the learning and educational experience of students. Good in teaching means having learned new skills and obtained new knowledge on learning and developing.	Excellent means to share new knowledge, skills and experience with colleagues in teams to improve their teaching. Being an excellent teacher adds value to one's professional standing.
	Excellence is directly linked to what it means for students.	Excellence is indirectly linked to what it means for students.
Assessors	Excellence means being an inspiring, inquiring and entrepreneurial teacher.	Excellence means excelling as a teacher and investing in one's professional development.
Management (organisation)	Excellence means having inspiring, inquiring and entrepreneurial teachers. Excellence as such is sought	Excellent teachers means having excellent schools. Having excellence standardises makes it

	in teachers and provided as learnable skills in a further development program for teachers. Providing a professionalisation program for excellent teachers means having a standardised system of assessing excellence.	learnable and means having governing tools. Having excellent schools means prosperity and having a strong position in the educational market economy.
	Excellence is directly linked to professional development.	Excellence is aimed at the right to exist as a VET college.

To recapitulate excellence holds no singular or universal meaning but different meanings. One meaning surrounds developing the local educational professional, schools and VET college to be better than others as seen from an economical perspective.

Furthermore excellence is used as a way of stating what the quality of education is. When doing this from the perspective of an educational organisation it gains a more managerial meaning. This type of meaning is also found in discourse on organisational development from a neo liberalistic perspective and the (global) standards that come with it. When looking at it from the teacher's perspective, elements shine through that seem to belong to a professional meaning where it is professionals among themselves who decide on what or who is excellent or otherwise.

Ultimately the notion of excellence in relation to be a teacher does not hold a clear or uniform meaning. When looking for a meaning it always has to be sought in relation to something else. In the case of this research project the meaning is found in relation to rewarding the quality of teaching/education/ a school through applying the notion "excellence" to teachers as a token/certificate of approval to their standard(s) of working by the management of the VET college or among teachers (professionals) themselves.

Missing from it all is a student's perspective on what standards are attributed to an excellent teacher. Open information on what constitutes 'excellent' classes for pupils is available through the internet (*ROC Tilburg - Excellentklas kappers*, n.d.) for example. Based upon this it can be argued that students within the organisation are familiar with the word "excellent".

They know what attributes are linked to the programme for students and it would have been interesting to see in what respect students explain excellence in relation to teachers. Subsequently the meaning given to the notion excellence in this context could be considered incomplete as an actor (students) from the field of education is omitted.

6.3 Reflecting on the research approach

This chapter is also the place to discuss the use and usefulness of the applied research approach in this research project. In chapter three the choices regarding the research approach are discussed in detail. As an introduction here this can be very briefly summarised as being a qualitative single case study with multiple units. Data has been gathered from the units and placed in a data archive. This data archive ended up being filled with eighty plus data sources of written material. This from then on was named the data corpus. This data corpus has been approached from a constructionist research approach using discourse analytical tools ranging from content analyses to discourse analyses. For this latter round the researcher used a neutral but informed stance to make decisions between rounds of analysing. This stance was on the one hand obtained after getting feedback on the research process from both the research supervisor and one critical friend from outside the research context. On the other hand the fact that doing six consecutive analysing rounds with each a number of iterations proved helpful in creating distance between the case context and the researcher.

The research project is part of an EdD program undertaken by the researcher. As described in paragraphs **Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.** and 3.2 the researcher is a practitioner in the field of education who has taken a few steps out of practice and into the field of academia. This EdD program is part of this. With this firm stance in a practice under investigation there is a profound risk of bias towards the research conduct. However, doing qualitative research from a constructionistic approach can never be completely un-biased. The understanding during the search for an appropriate research method that meaning is given to notions where people use language among themselves also provided the possibility of letting data exist out of written material. With this and the above mentioned moments it became much easier for the researcher to distance himself from the research context.

The argument can therefore be made that the research approach lends itself well to providing distance between the researcher and the research context. By having data solely existing out of written material there is hardly any risk of the researcher influencing the data since already existing material cannot be tainted by the hand of the researcher. The research approach adopted helped to filter and sift through the data. This happened in a series of six rounds but in the course of each round more iterations of going over the data took place. This resulted in

a feeling of not being able to see the forest for the trees; not that perspective is lost but no longer recognising the familiar surroundings helps to create distance between the context and the researcher. This helps to achieve rigour from a qualitative researcher's perspective as Walker (2015) intends it to be, namely by getting a convincing argument across regarding one's interpretations.

In addition to looking at the usefulness of the discourse analytical tools employed, it is also important to reflect on the content analysis that has been used. As a start content analytical tools were used to first get a feeling for the data. The results from this provided a broad overview of what the data might hold. Content analyses by means of word searches and word counts were used for this. Based on these rounds of content analysis the first sorting could be done. It provided a structured and clear way of sorting the data. After sorting the data on this basis in several units the result from several content analytical rounds were used in cohesion with each other and a few queries were run to further sift and filter the data corpus. The benefit of doing multiple content analytical rounds was that as a researcher one sees all data sources more than once and obtains a good in-depth feel of what the data is endowed with.

The discourse analytical tools employed in Gee's (2014) fashion has been explained in detail in the methodology chapter (see 3.10 and 3.12.1). Looking back at these rounds it is worth discussing the real gain from this approach. This did not come from drily employing the tools as they are intended. The real gain lies in the fact that it enables a neutral but informed stance that the researcher could take on the basis of the literature review but even more by the need to explain the analysis to the supervisor and the critical friend as well. By employing the different analysing rounds and going over the iterations of data as a researcher one gets more and more detached from the actual case. It helps to generate a more distant perspective that enables the researcher to become more neutral in relation to the case context.

However the fact remains that even though the research project set out to find the meaning given to the notion when used in a social setting and analysing this use of language it is fair to say that the discourse analyses have been more critical discourse analytical than when envisaged at the start of the research project. As well as showing a meaning given to the notion as a qualification of ability, the findings have also shown that it is about competition for students occurring between schools. Furthermore the findings have also shown that being part of the excellent teaching program was about distributing knowledge in and across schools in order to improve the outcome of education. By revealing that this competition and overarching knowledge production is present in the case investigated a picture might begin to form that the focus on excellence within the organisation and specific professionalisation

program is deliberate from the start. It is deliberate in the sense that the educational organisation has been infused with national and global initiatives related to improving education. Therefore the conclusion must be that at the start of the research project the approach was named discourse analyses; but at the end of the thesis the approach has moved towards critical discourse analysis. Moreover, Fairclough's (2004) notion of discourse analysis as a general category that subsumes critical versions is helpful in positioning the approach adopted.

This conclusion also makes it necessary to revisit the neutral but informed stance that I as a researcher claimed to have taken. Neutral and critical tend not to go hand in hand very well. With taking a neutral but informed stance the aim was to create as much distance as possible between the researcher and the context in which the research project took place. Being informed about the setting meant that being an insider researcher one has more insights and knowledge of an organisations. From the start my intention was to try to avoid forcing the research and at a later stage the findings into a predetermined conceptual framework. The reason for working from this intention has to do with insights obtained during conversations with other discourse researchers. In conversations and further delving into the matter of critical discourse analysis, an image emerged that a critical discourse researcher uses a lens aimed at exposing inequality and domination in social settings. For my research I started from the surprise that a word such as excellence is used in an educational context without knowing exactly what it means. Not having a focus from a predetermined conceptual framework was helpful in the way that it made it possible to use content analysis and discourse analyses tools in equal amount. This made it possible to sort and filter the data archive from a neutral but informed perspective and end up with a data set that was rich in information. But by holding strongly to this distancing it also made it necessary to add an extra round of analysing to fully bring to the surface what the meaning of the notion was. This final round was important to do as it brought to light the neo-liberal mechanisms at work in developing educational organisations. It might have been better to have made this observation earlier on the thesis.

Discussing the findings and listening to the feedback given in the form of remarks or questions posed by others also provides more informed insights. This also fosters neutrality by helping to bring to the surface the times and moments where assumptions are at the risk of becoming dominant.

The approach used has provided the means to take a thorough inquiry into the data corpus through a structured analysis to get to the bottom of what the data corpus includes. The data corpus contains discourse belonging to a professionalisation program for teachers. In this

program social processes and actions take place and are captured with the discourse. Thus in line with a constructionist viewpoint the actors in the program exist in the discourse. By analysing the discourse it has been possible to find the constructed meanings given to the notion excellence. The findings chapter has shown this. With the findings it should be possible to draw conclusions in relation to answering the research questions of this research project.

To summarise the results from this research support might not shed ground-breaking new light on the already existing idea that excellence only gains meaning when used in relation to something else. Notwithstanding the results from this research do provide a deeper insight into the meaning given to excellence in relation to teacher professionalisation in the VET sector. As such it answers to a call heard in the Netherlands for more clarity on the meaning of the notion used (see 2.3 A universal meaning given to excellence within published academic literature On page 8). This work also contributes to existing knowledge of the use of the notion as a managerial tool for economic benefits and is connected to the managerial language and ideas stemming from a neo-liberalistic culture.

The undertaking of this research project in partial fulfilment for an EdD also yields a practical implication. This centres around the use of content and discourse analysis as methodologies with which to inquire into the field of education. Inquiring into the field of education from a constructionist perspective and employing discourse analytical tools is a new way of working in this practice. It provides a different way of substantiating the teaching and educational practice as there is always a moment when schools are asked to be accountable to society. The finding of this study in respect of the usefulness of the methodological approach has shown that meaning given by people working together can be brought to the surface using discourse as data. Discourse as data is available in schools but is hardly ever used when schools are asked to be accountable to society. Visits by school inspections and through financial annual reporting are much more common.

To further illustrate this it is worthwhile focusing on the methodological approach and tools used. In this research project a combination of content analyses and discourse analyses is used to analyse the data corpus. It turned out that the combination of content analyses and discourse analyses worked well together. If only content analyses had been used the coded words would have been made visible throughout the data corpus, but no deeper meaning would have been found. This can be illustrated by the finding that when the matrix used to assess the participants was analysed solely by content analyses the different graduations of being excellent would not have been found. Applying the discourse analytical tools to the same matrix provided the finding that the matrix had been compiled by the management of

the organisation. This tied the finding in with other data sources. Data sources from Unit A for example were mainly on the “why” of the program that formed discourse about the plan of the professionalisation programme to enhance the professionalism of the teachers because to have the best teachers would lead to be the best educational institution. Therefore, applying the dual analytical tools of content analyses and discourse analyse provides a better methodological approach than when only one had been employed.

A practical implication of this conclusion is that with content and discourse analytical tools staff departments of large school organisations have a different option when asked to analyse or look at their own practice. It provides tools and with it a research approach to inquire into one’s own policies or look back at why choices have been made in the past when reconstructions of past situations are needed.

One could ask why not use interviews or free essay writing or even a questionnaire as other researchers have done in their quest for the meaning of excellence (see 2.3.4 on page 16). The answer for this, one could argue, lies in the fact that when using these methodological approaches individuals belonging to the situation under investigation are asked to do something that leads to data. There will always be some sort of influence of the actual action undertaken that might influence the outcome of the research project. At the same time it must be possible to interview all relevant participants and actors in the context of the research. Another element is that when using the research approach undertaken in this research project and dealing with a data corpus existing out of discourse ultimately all is material. The texts produced can be used when the individual participants are no longer available. It presents researchers with the possibility to inquire after the meaning of excellence for example in a certain context or time and place long after this time and place has gone by.

Therefore it can be argued that especially research questions that set out to find meaning or understanding of things at a certain time or within a certain context that works with documents that generates discourse might very well be answered using the methodological approach as used in this research.

As pointed out above a limitation of this study is lack of information in the data corpus that could be attributed to students or pupils. In spite of this limitation, the findings show that it still adds to the understanding of what is meant when using the word because the information that is present in the data corpus represents language used in the context of the VET college. At the same time the amount of data present made it possible to distil meaning from it through the use of discourse analysis. Because of this limitation a further study to grasp a full meaning given to the notion in the case context investigated might be a fruitful area to

examine. The question is if this might be possible as it could be difficult to locate the students that were being taught by the participants in the program at that time.

Taking everything together the final conclusion can only be that this research is not the end of finding meaning given to excellence but is an end for this research project as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Educational Doctorate.

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8 Appendices

8.1 Wordcloud



Figure 10

8.2 Hotspots from Unit A

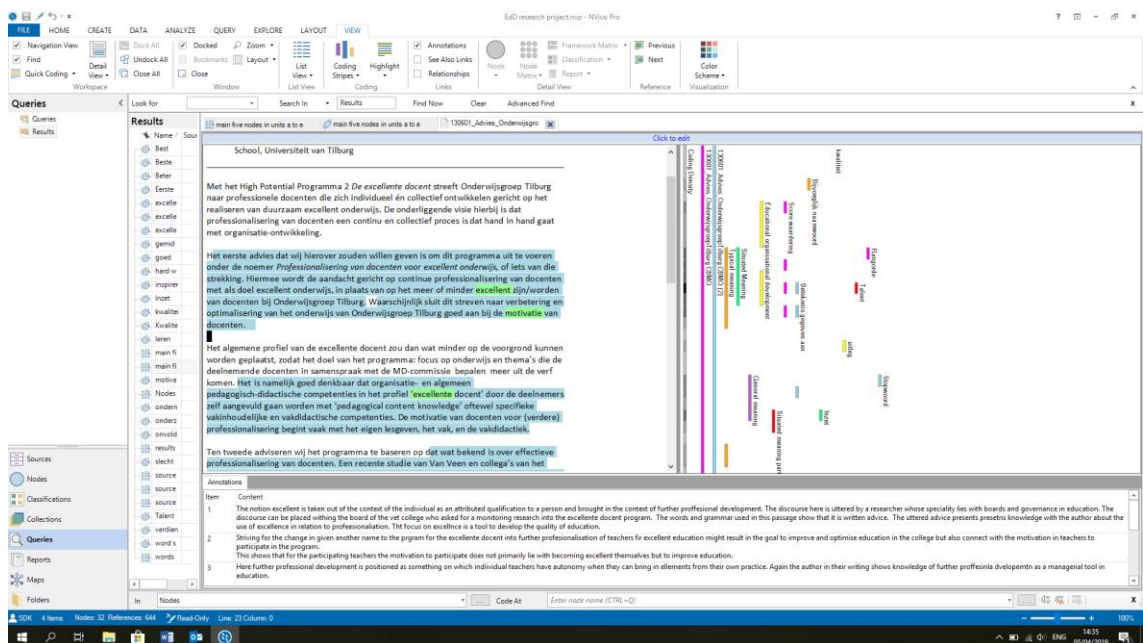


Figure 11

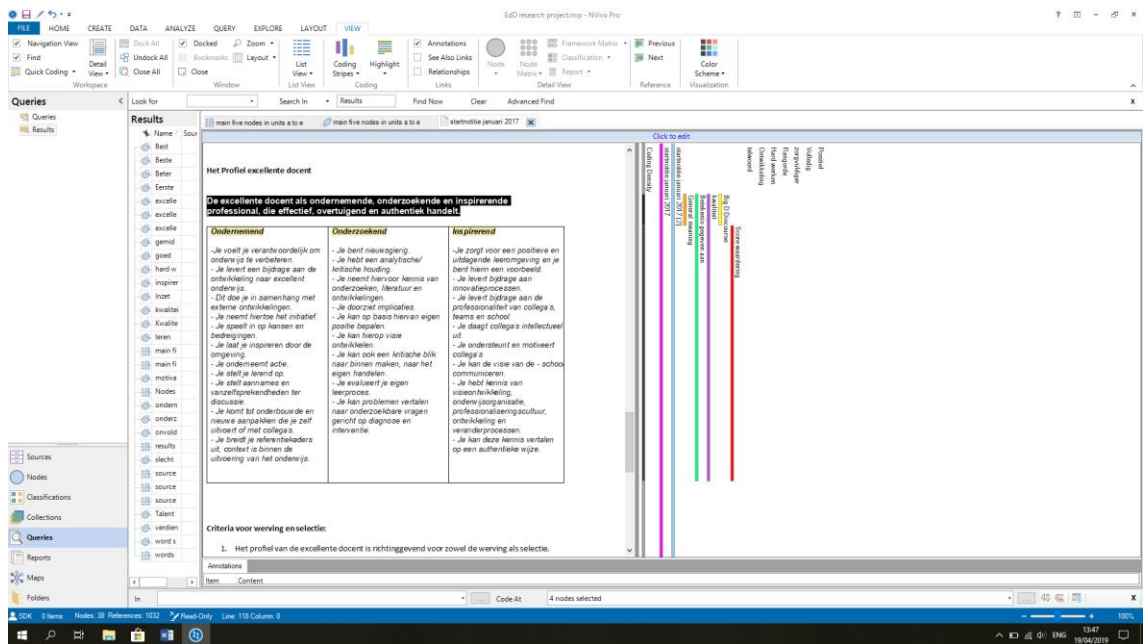


Figure 12

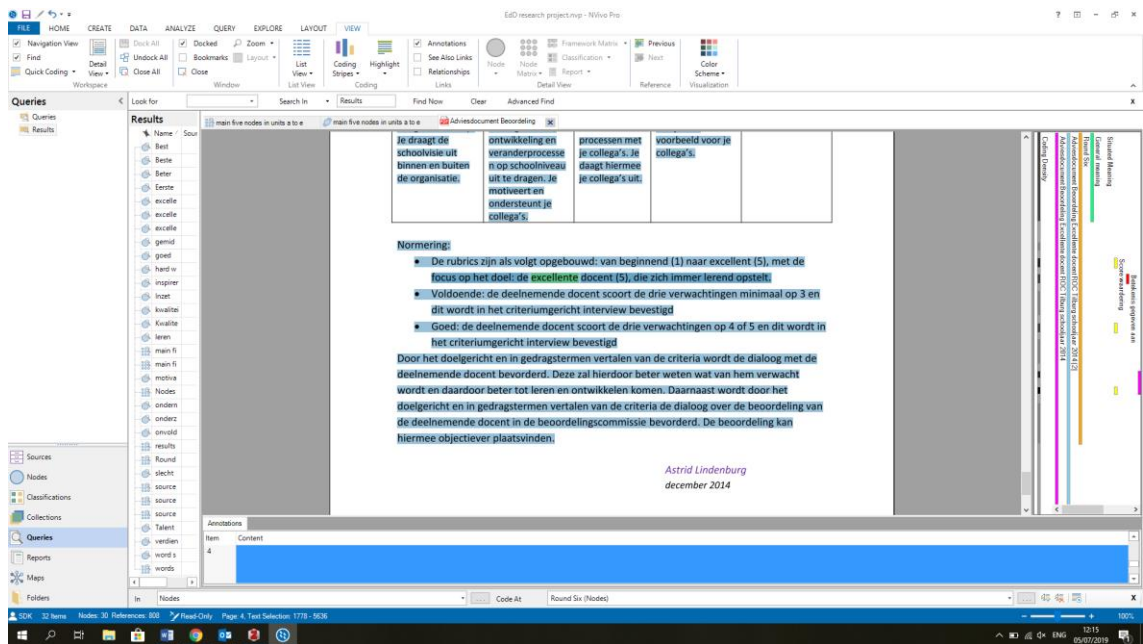


Figure 13

8.3 Hotspots from Unit B

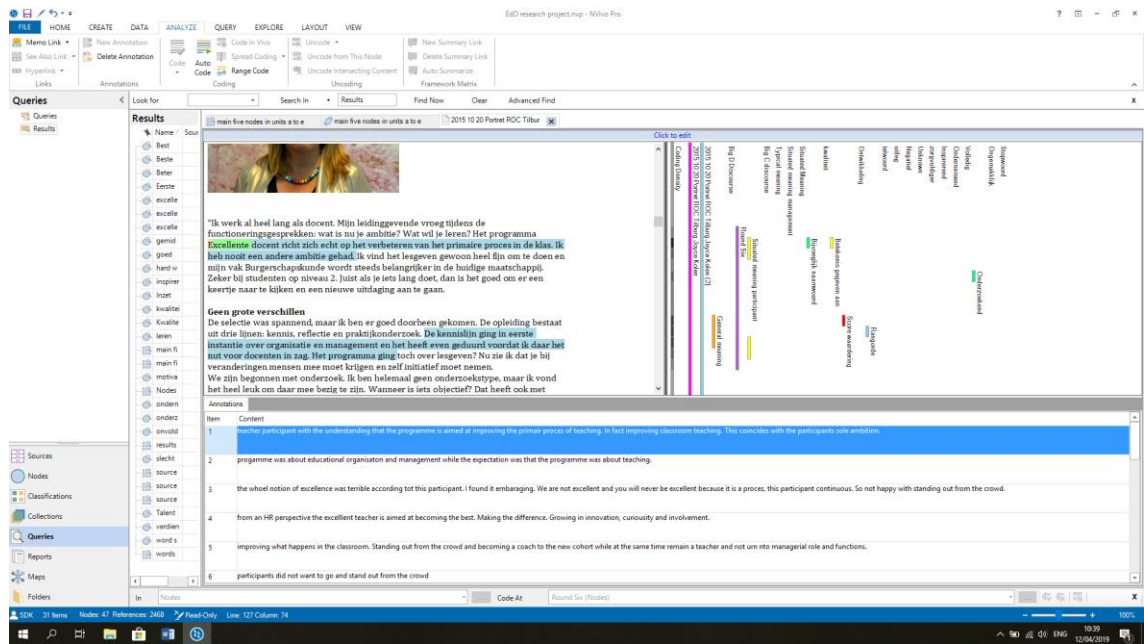


Figure 14

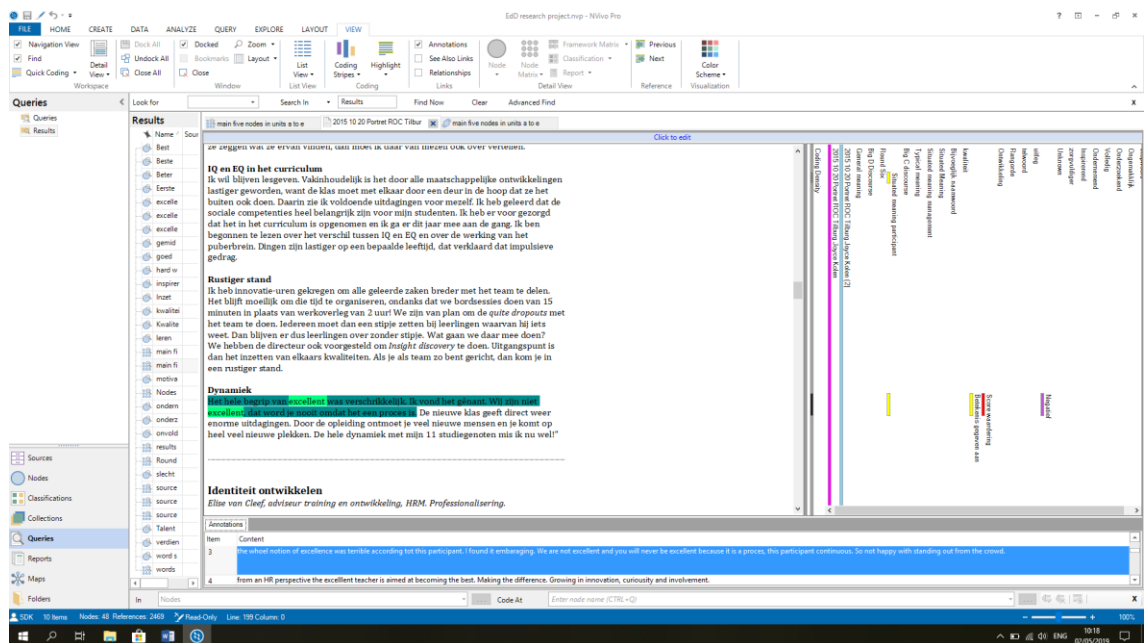


Figure 15

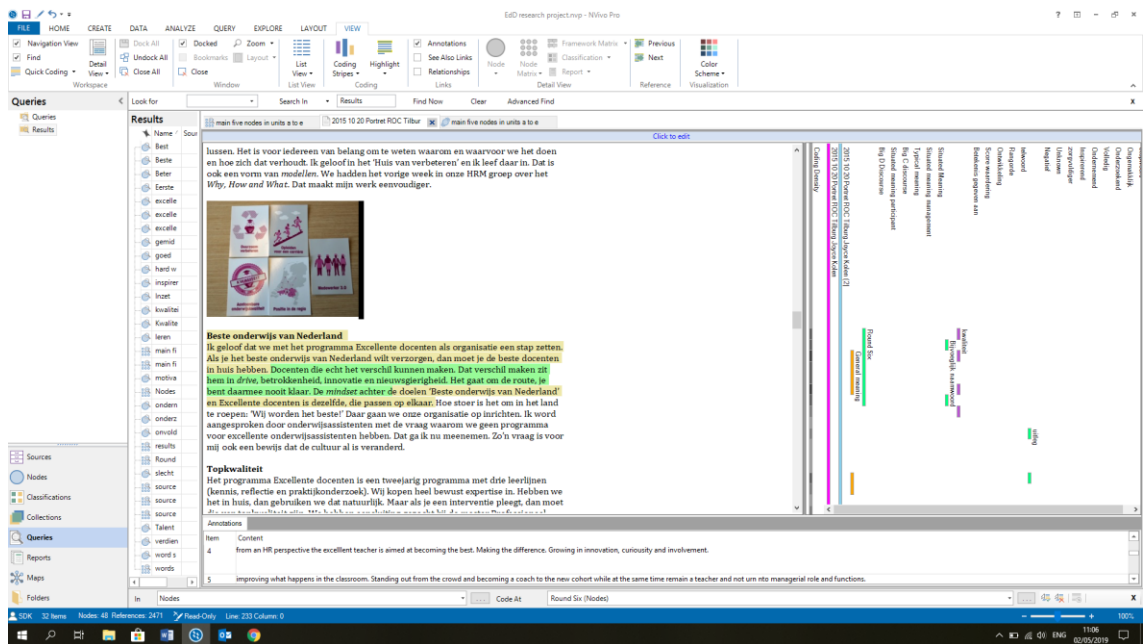


Figure 16

8.4 Hotspot from unit C

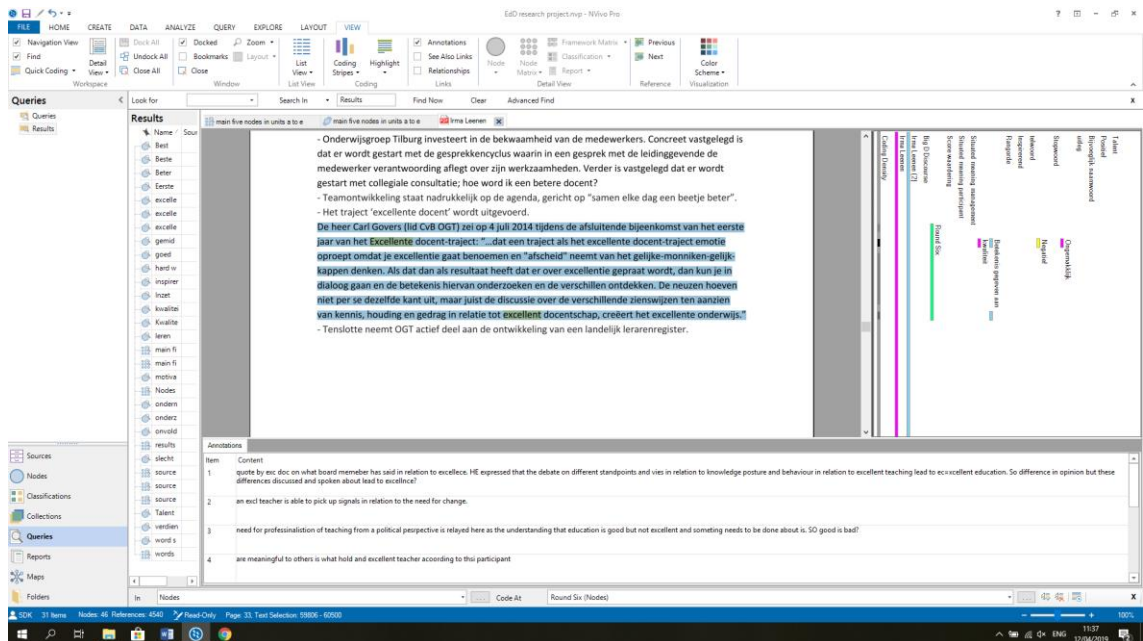


Figure 17

8.5 Hotspot from unit D

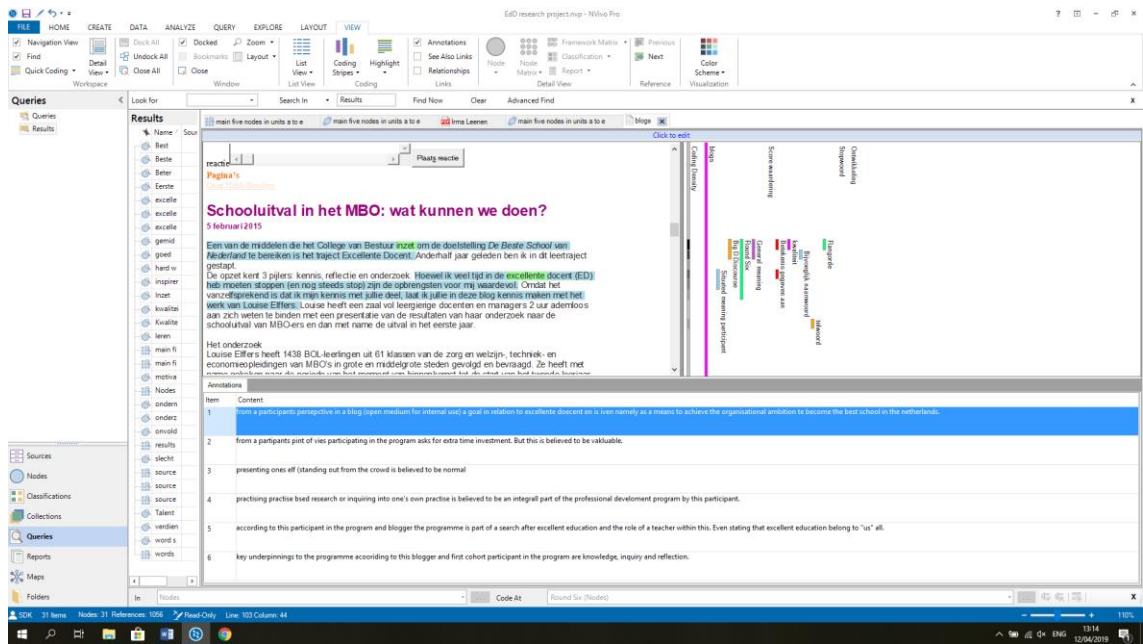


Figure 18

8.6 Hotspots from unit E

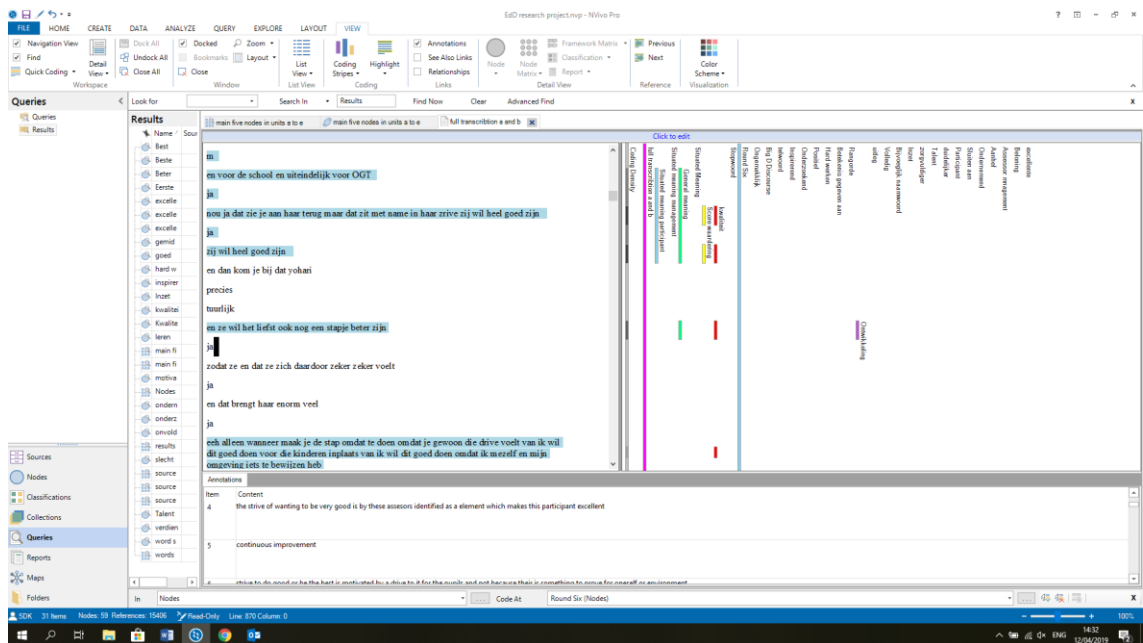


Figure 19

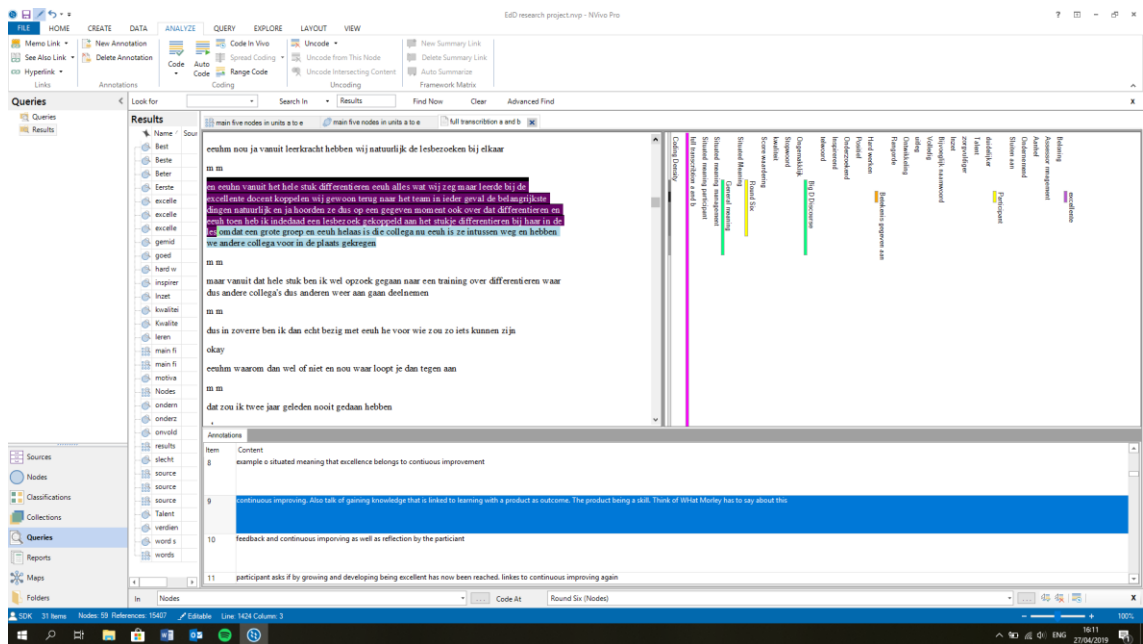


Figure 20

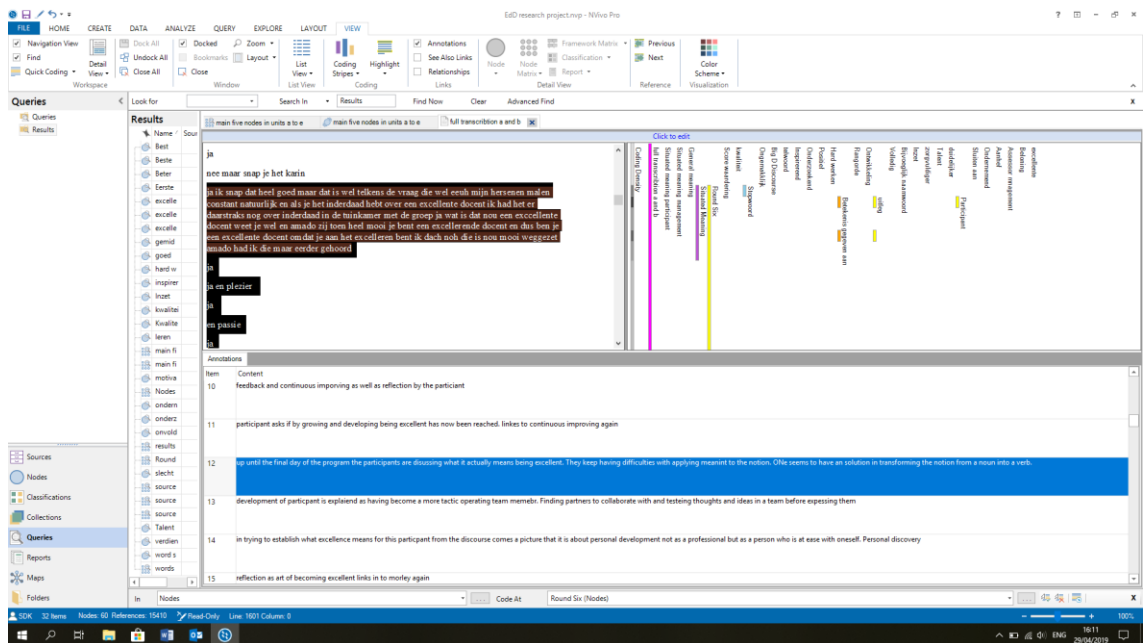


Figure 21

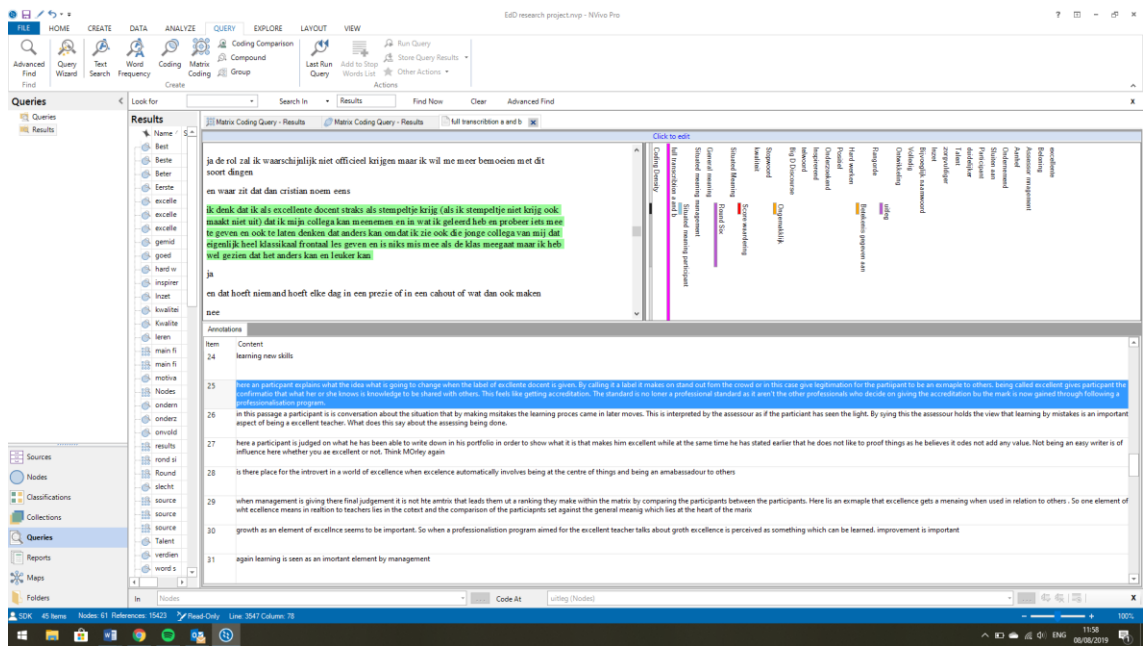


Figure 22

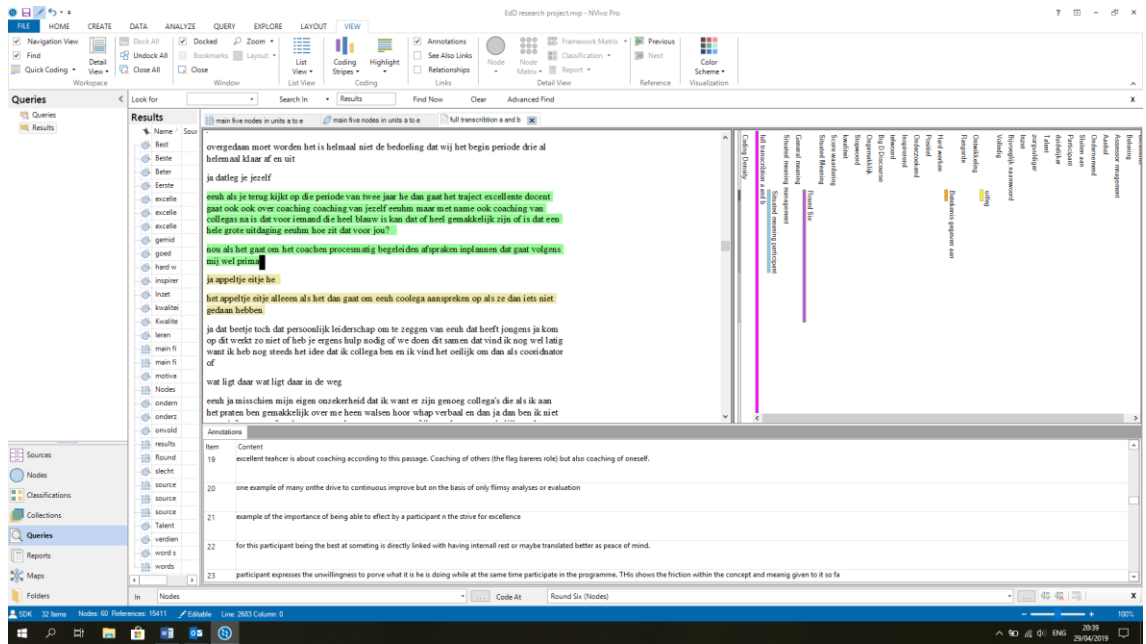


Figure 23

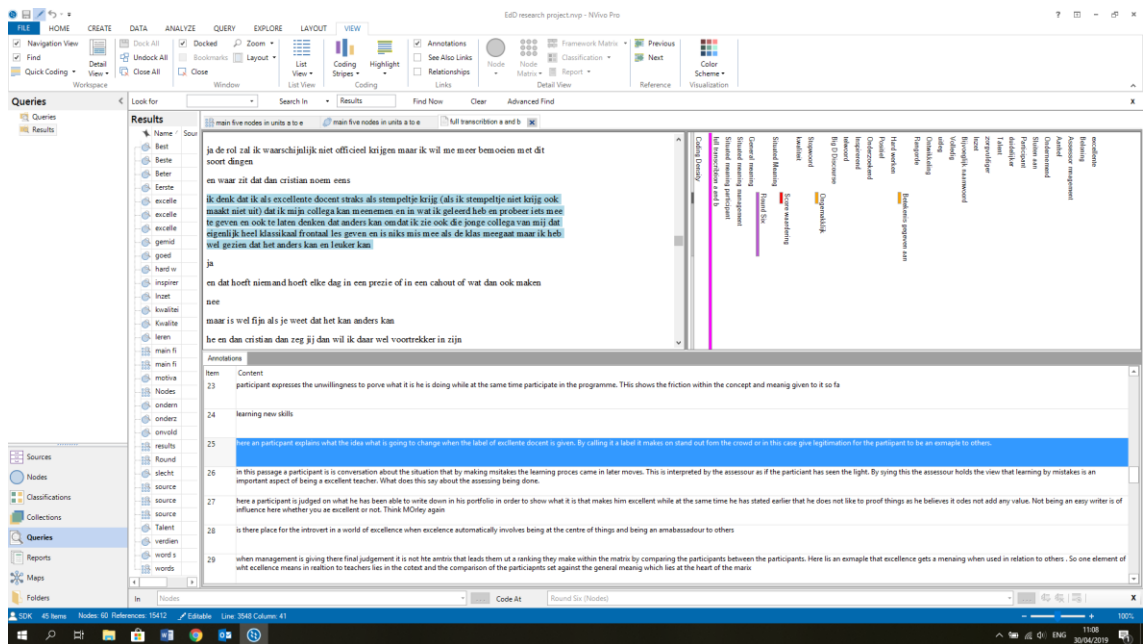


Figure 24

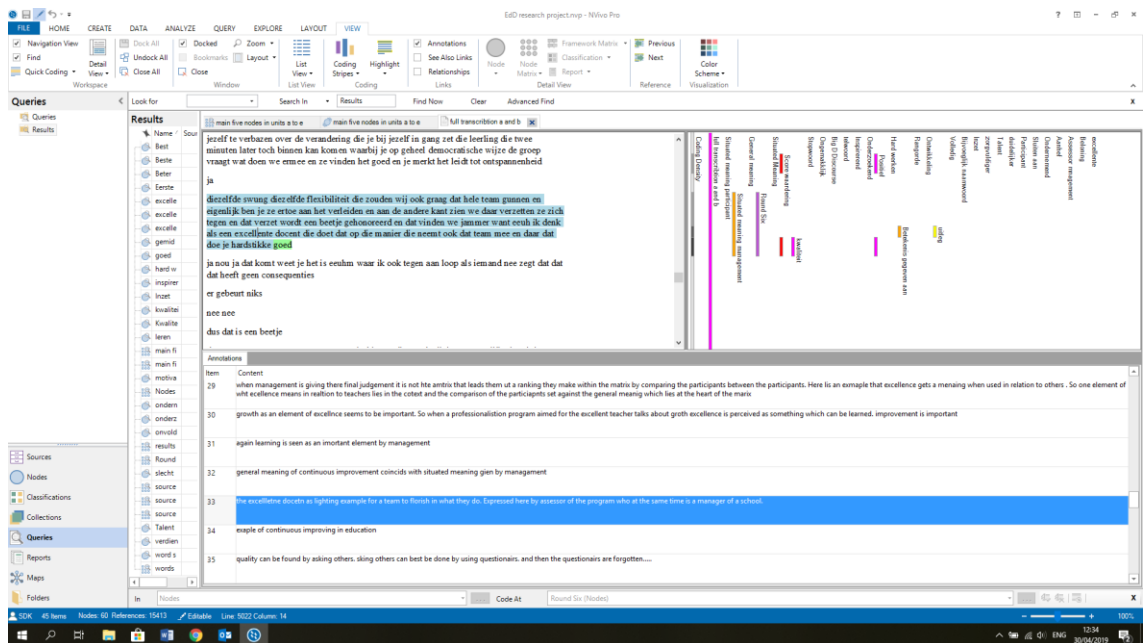


Figure 25

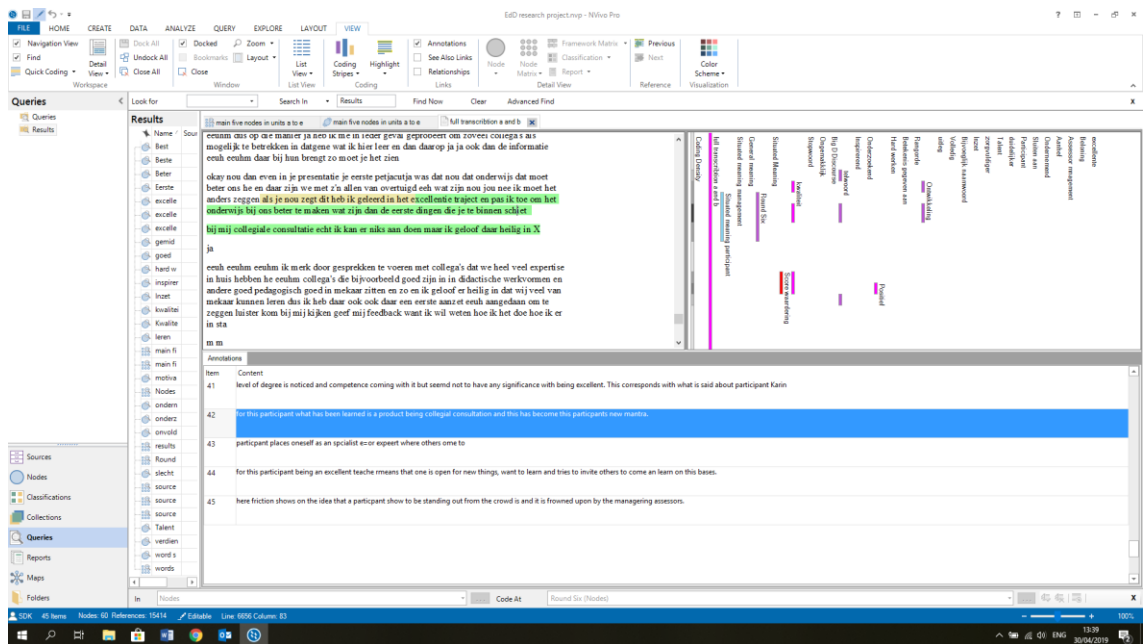


Figure 26

8.7 Ethics approval



ETHICAL PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING

PERMISSION TO PROCEED WITH RESEARCH: ETHICAL APPROVAL AS OUTLINED IN APPLICATION

Name: Sander De Kock

Research Area/Title: Quest for the meaning of Excellence

Date Approved by Ethics Committee: 04/01/2018

Contact FACE Research Office at face.research@hull.ac.uk for further information or clarification.

8.8 Suggestions for translations

Place in thesis	Original	Suggestion / other remarks
Table 4.3	Onderzoeken – Inquisitive	Research
Table 4.7	Betekenisgeven aan – Giving meaning	Giving meaning to .
	Sluiten aan – connects to	Connects with (or do you mean plugged in?)
Translation of figure 8	(The first piece advice we would like to give is to perform this program under the name <i>Further professional development for excellent education</i> , or something along these lines. By doing so attention is on continuous professional development of teachers with an aim for excellent education instead of aiming on becoming more or less excellent by teachers of Onderwijsgroep Tilburg. This will probably connect better to the striving for improving and optimising education at Onderwijsgroep Tilburg which is the motivation of the teachers in the program).	(The first piece advice we would like to give is to perform this program under the name <i>Further professional development for excellent education</i> , or something along these lines. By doing so focus is on continuous professional development of teachers with an aim for excellent education instead of aiming for becoming more or less excellent by teachers of Onderwijsgroep Tilburg. This will probably connect better with the striving for improving and optimising education at Onderwijsgroep Tilburg which is the motivation of the teachers in the program).
P 83	(5) Presumably this attempt for improving and optimising education at Onderwijsgroep Tilburg connects well with teacher motivation.	(5) Presumably this attempt to improve and optimise education at Onderwijsgroep Tilburg connects well with teacher motivation.
P 85	(1)The excellent teacher as an →entrepreneurial, inquiring and	(1)The excellent teacher as an →entrepreneurial, inquiring and

	inspiring →professional, who →acts effective, convincing and authentic.	inspiring →professional, who →acts effectively , convincing and authentic.
Table P 86	1.6- You let yourself be inspired by the environment	You are inspired by
	1.8- You take learning position.	You are open to new ideas
	1.9-You questions assumptions and self-explanations.	You questions assumptions and self-evident truth
	2.4- You see the implications	You understand the implications
	2.7- You can also take a critical look inside, at your own actions.	You can also take a critical look, at your own actions.
	3.1- You provide a positive and challenging learning environment and you are an example in this.	You provide a positive and challenging learning environment and you set an example.
	3.4- You intellectually challenge colleagues	You challenge colleagues intellectually
P 88	Standardisation: The rubrics are structured as follows: from starting (1) to excellent (5), with the focus on the goal: the excellent teacher (5), who always takes a learning position. Sufficient: the participating teacher scores the three expectations at least at 3 and this is confirmed in the criteria-oriented interview Good: the participating teacher scores the three expectations at 4 or 5 and this is confirmed in the criteria-oriented interview.	Standardisation: The rubrics are structured as follows: from starting (1) to excellent (5), with the focus on the goal: the excellent teacher (5), who always shows a learning attitude . Sufficient: the participating teacher scores 3 for three expectations at least at 3 and this is confirmed in the criteria-oriented interview Good: the participating teacher scores 4 or 5 for two of the three expectations at 4 or 5 and this is confirmed in the criteria-oriented interview.
P 89	1 You reflect on your own teaching: along the bar of new developments.	1 You reflect on your own teaching: according to new developments
P 92	(3)I just find teaching very nice to do and my subject Burgerschapskunde becomes more and more important in our contemporary society.	I like teaching very much and my subject Burgerschapskunde becomes more and more important in our contemporary society.

	4)Especially with level 2 students.	Especially for level 2 students.
	5)Especially when you do something for a long time already it is good to look at it at one time and o for new challenges.	Especially when you do something for a long time to closely look at it again and find new challenges
P 93	(8)The training consist of three lines: knowledge, reflection and pactice based research.	The training consist of three aspects : knowledge, reflection and pactice based research.
	(9)The knowledge line was at first mainly about organisation and management and it took a while before I saw the utility for teachers in this.	The knowledge aspect was at first mainly about organisation and management and it took a while before I saw the utility for teachers in this.
	(10)The programme should be about teaching?	The programme was supposed to be about teaching?
	(11)It is now that I see that you need to take people along and show your own initiative when you want to change something.	Now I see that you need to take people along and show your own initiative when you want to change something.
P 96	(2)"... a course like the eccellente docent brings out emotions because you are identifying excellence and say "goodbye" to thinking that everybody is equal.	"... a course like the eccellente docent brings out emotions because you are identifying excellence and saying "goodbye" to thinking that everybody is equal.
	(4)Not everyone has to be on the same page, precisely the discussion on different views about knowledge, attitude and behaviour in reaction to excellent teaching create excellent education".	Not everyone has to be on the same page, precisely the discussion on different views about knowledge, attitude and behaviour in reaction to excellent teaching creates excellent education".
P 98	(2)A year and a half again I entered this learning path.	A year and a half ago I entered this learning path.
In table from p 99	And that brings here an enormous amount	And that brings her a lot
	Eeuh, only when do you make that step, just because you have the urge to do it well for the children instead of I want to do this well because I have to prove something to myself and my surroundings	Eeuh, only when do you take that step, just because you have the urge to do it well for the children instead of I want to do this well because I have to prove something to myself and my surroundings