



Universiteit Utrecht  
IVLOS

# The role of crisis in the development of teachers' professional identity

Paulien Meijer  
IVLOS Institute of Education  
Utrecht, the Netherlands

photo

Roeland (25),  
biology

Crisis

Paralyzed

Uncertainty

“What am I doing  
it for?”

Biking

“I’m back”

“I’m doing it for  
my pupils”

“I’m home at  
school”



## This keynote

- Some general practices in teacher education
- Teacher professional identity and its development
- (Adult) learning
- Transformative learning and the role of crisis
  - *You need a crisis in order to grow-*
- Implications for teacher education



Universiteit Utrecht  
IVLOS

## This keynote

- Some general practices in teacher education

Learning to teach as “steady growth”



## Teachers' professional identity

is...

- an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences;
- implying both person and context;
- consisting of sub-identities that more or less harmonize with each other;
- asking for an active role of the student teacher.

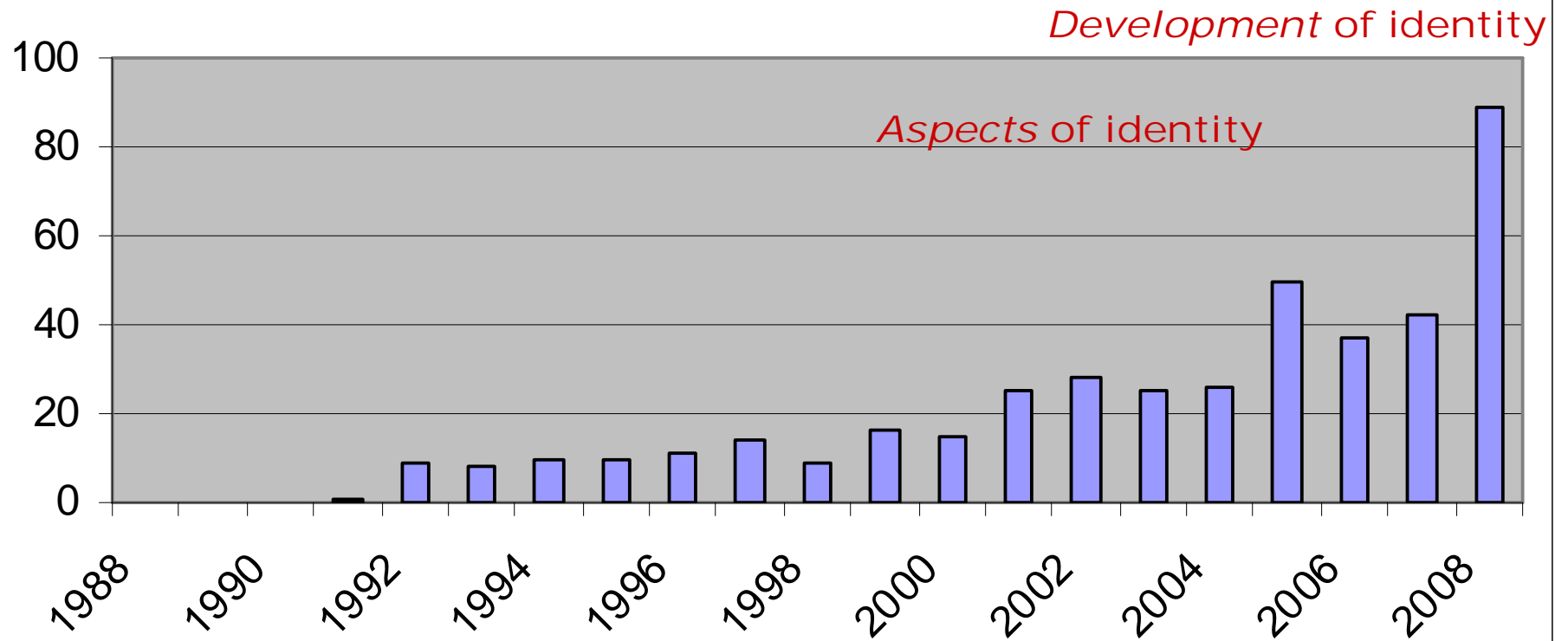
Beijaard et al. (2004)



## This keynote

- Some general practices in teacher education
- Teacher professional identity and its development
- (Adult) learning
- Transformative learning and the role of crisis
- Implications for teacher education

# Hits on "teacher identity" in ssci





## Four basic assumptions:

Identity is...

- dependent upon and formed within **multiple contexts**;
- formed in **relationship** with others and involves **emotions**;
- **shifting, unstable, and multiple**; and
- involves the **construction and reconstruction** of meaning through **stories** over time

(Rodgers & Scott, 2008; p. 733).





Universiteit Utrecht  
IVLOS

Identity development requires a  
*psychological shift...*





# Instability of identity

- “[Teacher identity] can be best characterized as an **ongoing process**, a process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context. ... “Who am I **at this moment**?” (Beijaard et al, 2004; p. 108)
- “identity is a **moving intersection** of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am” (Palmer, 1998; p.13).



## Four types of learning

- **Cumulative** or mechanical learning: establishing a (new) scheme or pattern
- **Assimilative** learning or learning by addition: linking a new element to an existing scheme / pattern
- **Accommodative** or transcendent learning: breaks down (parts of) an existing scheme and transform it so that new information or situation can be linked in.
- **Transformative** (Mezirow) or expansive (Engeström) learning: simultaneous restructuring of a whole cluster of schemes and patterns resulting in personality changes.



# Transformative learning

“This learning implies what could be termed **personality changes**, ... a break of orientation that typically occurs as **the result of a crisis-like situation** caused by challenges experienced as urgent and unavoidable, making it necessary to change oneself in order to get any further”.

(Illeris, 2008; p.14).



## “universal dimensions” of adult understanding and adult learning

Adults...

- seek meaning of their experience
- rely upon beliefs and understandings that produce interpretations and opinions which will feel as more true than any other opinions
- engage in reflective discourse to assess the reasons and assumptions supporting a belief to be able to arrive at a tentative best judgment
- imagine how things can be different
- learn to transform their frames of reference through critical reflection on assumptions, self-reflection on assumptions and dialogical reasoning when the beliefs and understandings they generate become problematic.

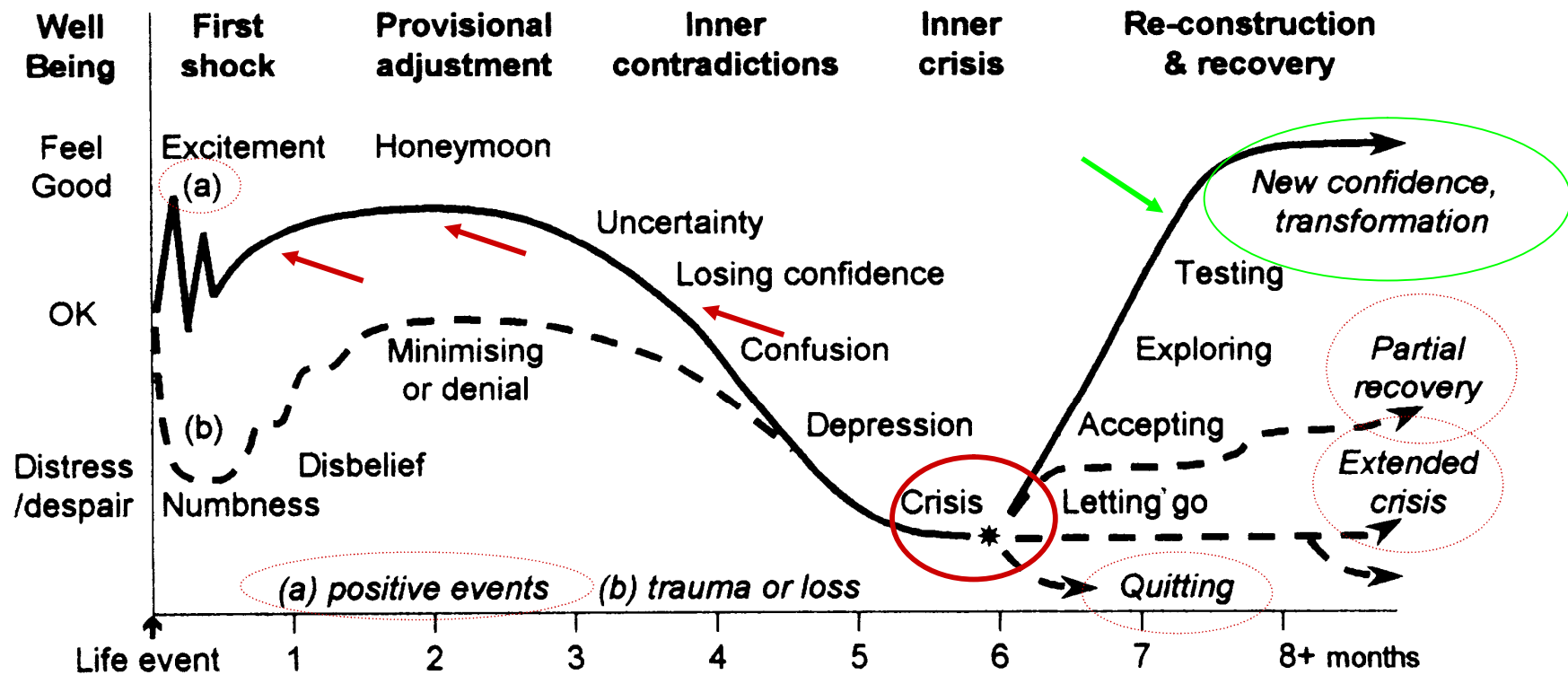
(Mezirow, 2008)



Universiteit Utrecht  
*IVLOS*

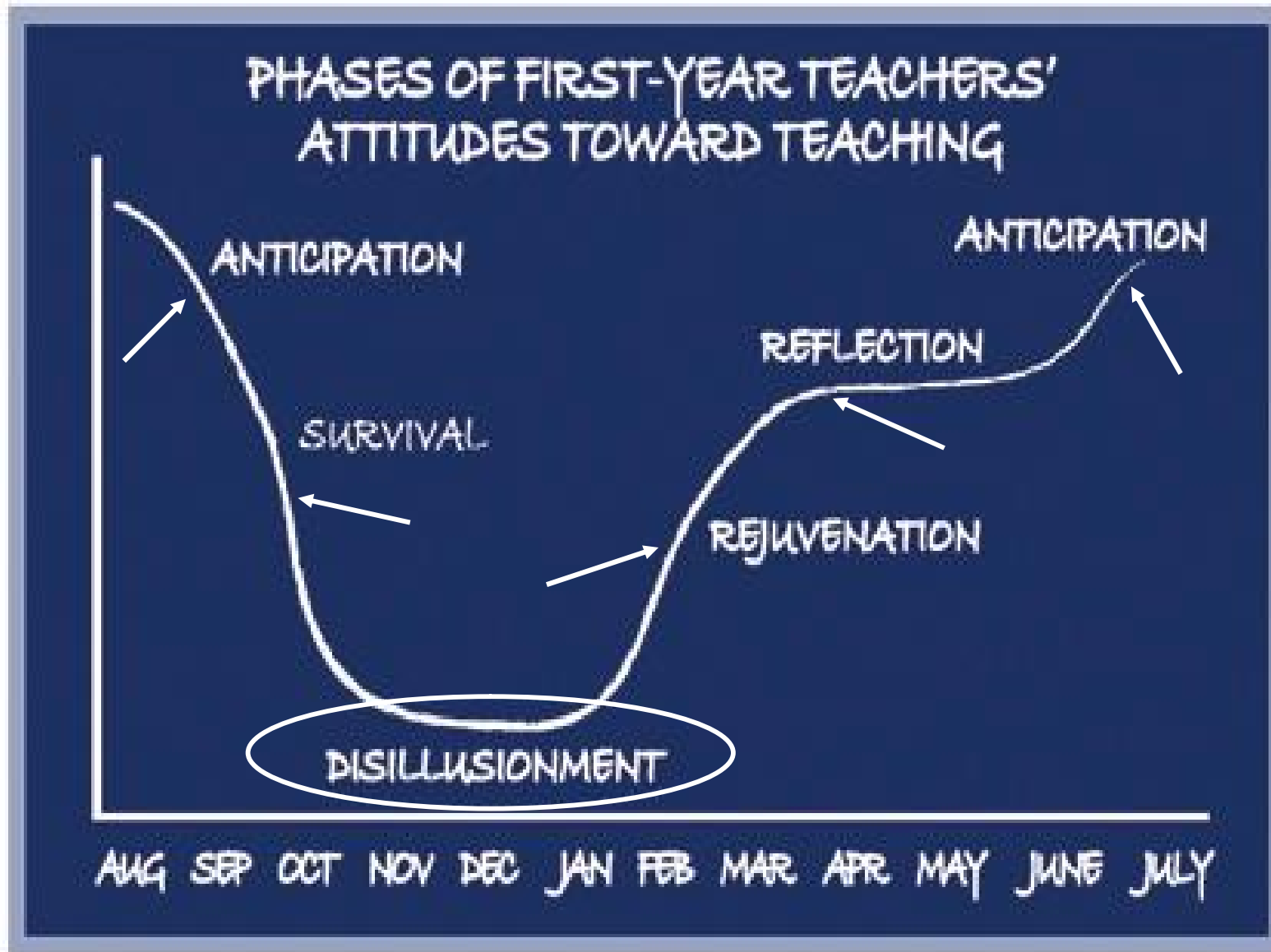
You need several identity shifts during life

Such shifts basically result from crises



## Phases and features of the Transition Cycle

based on Hopson B & Adams J: *Transition - Understanding and managing personal change*



Source: *The University of California Santa Cruz New Teacher Project*





Universiteit Utrecht  
IVLOS







# Student teachers in crisis

- “what am I doing it for?”
- “feeling completely incapable of teaching”
- “CHAOS in lessons”
- “shocked by students”
- “I definitely wanted to quit teaching. I felt completely useless as a teacher”

Moir:

- Questioning commitment and competence
- Self-doubt, lower self-esteem
- Get sick

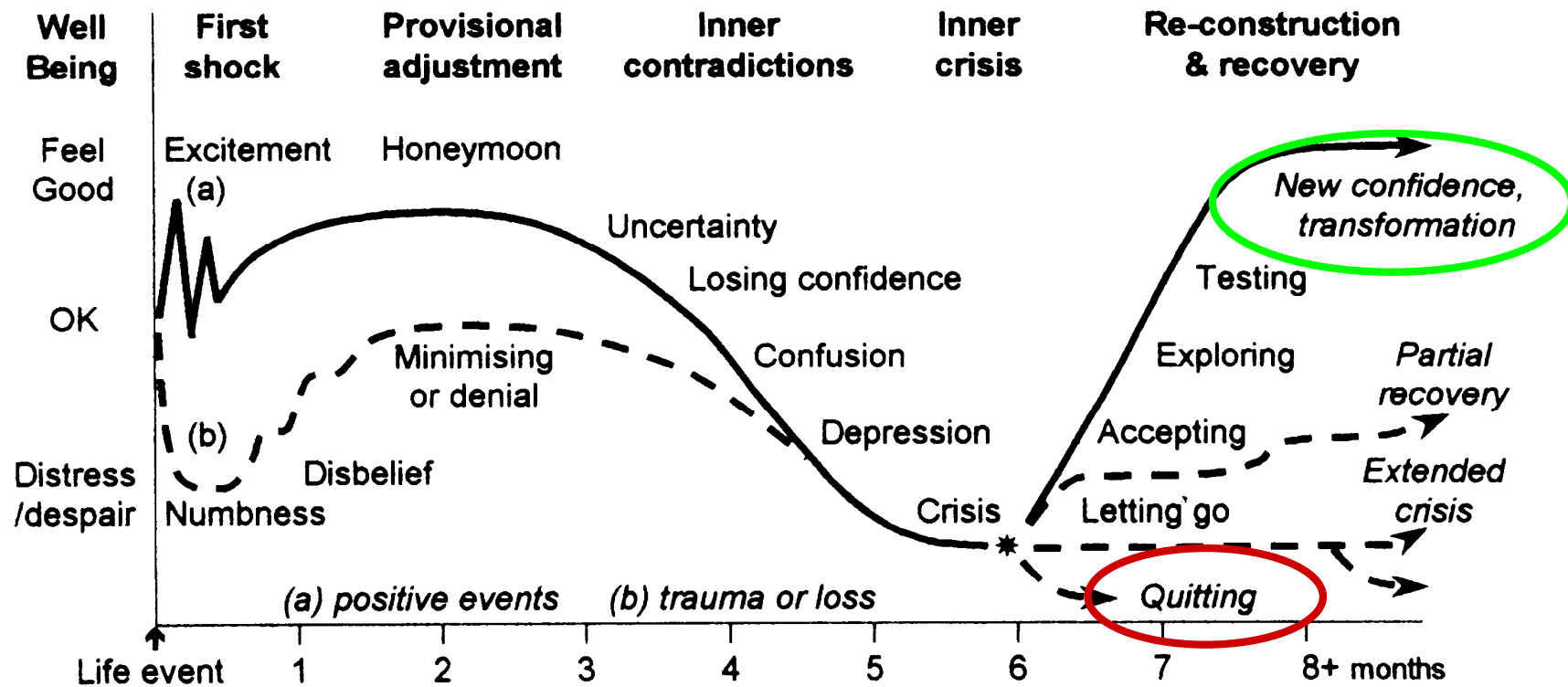
danger

A large, bold, black calligraphic character representing the Chinese word for 'danger' (危). The character is written in a dynamic, expressive style with thick, dark strokes.

opportunity

A large, bold, black calligraphic character representing the Chinese word for 'opportunity' (機). The character is written in a dynamic, expressive style with thick, dark strokes.

**WEI-CHI (CRISIS)**  
**"Danger Plus Opportunity"**



## Phases and features of the Transition Cycle

based on Hopson B & Adams J: *Transition - Understanding and managing personal change*



## Be(com)ing a teacher:

- "how do I learn to teach"
- "what does it mean (for me) to teach"
- "who am I as a teacher"

(Hargreaves, Kelchtermans, Day).



## Erik Erikson

- *Foreclosure*: timely closure of genuine experimenting, causing all kinds of possibilities not to be explored.
- *Identity Confusion*: causing an extended experimentation phase in which no real choices are made and no lessons are learned.
- *Synthetic Identity*: convulsive conformation to a system without finding out whether the chosen identity is in accordance with own deeper beliefs.





**WEI-CHI (CRISIS)**  
**"Danger Plus Opportunity"**

## Danger:

- Foreclosure / partial recovery
- Identity confusion / extended crisis
- Synthetic identity
- Quitting

## Opportunity:

- Transformation
- (in case of  
*developmental crisis*)





## This keynote

- Some general practices in teacher education (focus on “steady growth”)
- Teacher professional identity and its development
- (Adult) learning
- Transformative learning and the role of crisis (dangers and opportunity)
- Implications for teacher education





## Support for transformative learning

- Creating time and space for reflection
- Creating communities of trust
- Making sense of experience through stories
- Ask (student) teachers to confront and speak back to the external forces that shape and limit who and what a teacher is

(Rodgers & Scott, 2008)

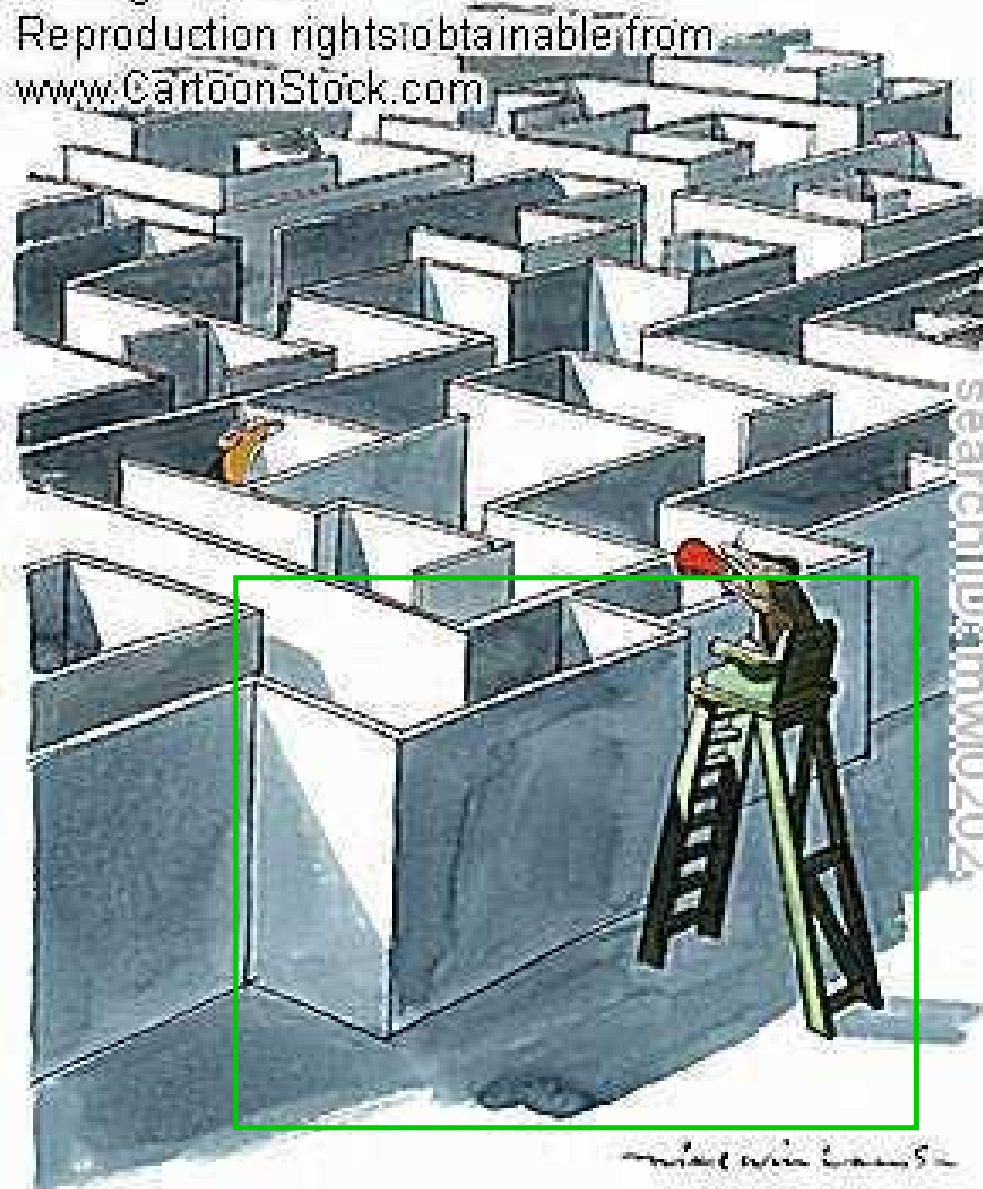


## *Provoke* transformative learning in teacher education:

- inspire mental resistance
- conflict or dilemma raising
- use of critical incidents, life histories, collaborative learning, etc., preferably in combination
- foster critical self-reflection of assumptions
- the support and encouragement of 'breakthrough' learning

Mezirow, Illeris

© Original Artist  
Reproduction rights obtainable from  
[www.CartoonStock.com](http://www.CartoonStock.com)



"We close at six!"

## Opportunity:

Transformation

## Conditions:

- Supportive work environment
- Transition support

## Inhibiting factors:

- Hostile work environment
- Poor transition management



## Some questions

- Will developmental crises lead to better teachers?
- How does this relate to the learning of experienced teachers?
- How 'dangerous' is the provocation of crisis?

*Thank you*