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ARTICLE

Coping strategies used by second-career student teachers

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Email: i.w.lvanheijst@uva.nl**Abstract**

Background: When second-career teachers (SCTs) learn to teach, they need to cope with the tension-evoking moments they encounter. Little is known about the coping strategies SCTs use to manage tensions.

Aim: The purpose of this study was to investigate the coping strategies SCTs use during the first 1.5 years of teacher training. The SCTs' own perceptions about the usefulness, evolution and specificity of these coping strategies were also studied.

Sample: Twenty-four SCTs in the alternative teacher training programme (ATTP) at the University of Amsterdam participated in this study. These SCTs aspired to become teachers of mathematics, physics, economics, computer science or chemistry.

Method: For each participant, written logbook fragments and interviews were analysed in Atlas-ti.

Results: The SCTs used in decreasing order: *intrapersonal approaching* (e.g., resolving problems autonomously), *interpersonal approaching* (e.g., consulting others) and *intrapersonal avoiding strategies* (e.g., ignoring an undesired situation). *Interpersonal avoiding strategies* were not mentioned at all.

While the SCTs reported approaching strategies (inter- and intrapersonal) as being useful for their development, we also found disadvantages to intrapersonal approaching strategies and advantageous uses of avoiding strategies. The SCTs noted several inter- and intrapersonal approaching coping strategies that they considered typical for SCTs.

Conclusion: Intrapersonal approaching coping strategies can be a risk because of the invisibility of these strategies. Interpersonal strategies should be stimulated because SCTs

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benefit from the social network in school. Avoiding strategies may serve a purpose for managing the complexity of the teaching profession.

KEYWORDS

professional teacher identity, second-career teachers, tensions

INTRODUCTION

Teacher shortages are a problem in many countries (Williams, 2013). The OECD (2018) showed a teacher shortage of 17% in Australia, 7.3% (Finland) to 75.3% (Luxembourg) in Europe and 25.8% in the United States. These shortages make alternative teacher training programmes (ATTPs) necessary, next to regular programmes. In this way, training programmes can more effectively address the needs of students. Moreover, it is possible to appeal to a larger group of people and motivate them to enter the teaching profession.

One noteworthy group following ATTPs consists of people working outside the educational context who are interested in a job as a second-career teacher (SCT) (Paniagua & Sanchez-Martí, 2018). Research has shown that general interest in becoming an SCT has increased significantly (Coppe et al., 2022; Dutch Ministry of Education, 2021; Dutch Ministry of Education, 2020; Paniagua & Sanchez-Martí, 2018). However, the Dutch Ministry of Education (2021) showed that only a small number (30%) who started the teacher training programme are still working in education after 7 years. In the United States, only 48% of the teachers starting an ATTP in higher education completed the programme (García & Weiss, 2019). It is desirable to increase these percentages because teacher shortages remain a growing problem (Adriaens et al., 2021). Additionally, SCTs might add important value to the development of the educational system because of the (professional) life experience they bring to education (Williams, 2013). Therefore, it is important to better understand what challenges SCTs encounter when they enter education and how they cope with these challenges in a way that contributes to their development.

During their training route, SCTs, like all beginning teachers, have tension-evoking experiences (Mayotte, 2003; Powers, 2002; Snyder et al., 2012; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; Williams, 2013). Such experiences can be sources of these teachers' growth (Caspari-Gnann & Sevan, 2022) but can also engender negative emotions and increased levels of stress (Admiraal et al., 2000; Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013; Perez & Reicherts, 1992), which might eventually cause dropout. The greater the scope and variety of the individual's coping repertoire, the more protection coping offers (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). However, knowledge concerning SCTs' methods of coping with the demands of their new profession is scarce. Thus, this study aims to gain insight into the coping strategies used by SCTs ($n = 24$) to manage the tensions they encounter. We expect this knowledge to be useful to better understand why SCTs dropout and how we can prevent SCTs from leaving the training programme.

Tensions and coping

It has been indicated that SCTs experience specific tensions during their development as teachers compared to first-career teachers (FCTs). SCTs' tensions relate to their role as novice teachers or trainees, their experience of the educational context and the training route (Van Heijst et al., [under review](#)). Tensions associated with being a novice teacher/trainee have been shown to originate from the gap between SCTs' position as a novice teacher/–trainee and a former high-status position. This enhances SCTs' desire to perform at an expert level and whether or not utilizing their previously acquired skills and knowledge, which may not always be immediately deployable (Den Hertog et al., 2023). Tensions in the educational context concern the SCTs' perception of the teaching profession, namely when the

work is harder than expected (Ballado, 2022; Cuddapah & Stanford, 2015) and their ideals that do not always match reality (Tigchelaar et al., 2010). Concerning the training route, tensions have been shown to arise when the training route does not accommodate the SCTs' needs (Hogg et al., 2023; Van Heijst et al., [under review](#); Watters & Diezmann, 2015; Williams, 2013) and desire for social support in school (Coppe et al., 2023). Additionally, SCTs have been found to experience a lack of time (Williams, 2013) and uncertainty about the future (Van Heijst et al., [under review](#)).

When SCTs can manage tensions by coping with them effectively, these tensions may become sources for professional growth instead of reasons to cease training. Therefore, it is important to gain more insight into the coping strategies used by SCTs. However, defining the concept of coping is challenging (Latack & Havlovic, 1992; Stanislawski, 2019), and there is a lack of consensus on how coping strategies should be operationalized (Skinner et al., 2003). Our study defines coping as cognitive and behavioural processes intended to reduce stressful encounters (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These processes can have an approaching or avoiding (Boekaerts, 2002; Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013) as well as an interpersonal or intrapersonal nature (Latack & Havlovic, 1992; see [Figure 1](#)).

Approaching versus avoiding coping strategies

Boekaerts (2002) and Gustems-Carnicer and Calderón (2013) classified coping as *approaching* and *avoiding* strategies. This dichotomy finds its roots in the problem- versus emotion-focused classification applied by Folkman and Lazarus (1980), which sometimes leads to ambiguity since tensions are always associated with emotions (Lehne & Koelsch, 2015). Therefore, our study prefers the approaching–avoiding dichotomy. Approaching strategies are characterized by consciously, rationally and systematically taking perceptible or imperceptible actions, such as prioritizing, adapting expectations, reflecting (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Murray-Harvey et al., 2000), using humour and undertaking physical activities (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2000; Richards, 2012) to approach a problem or emotion. Avoiding strategies, on the other hand, are characterized by passive, irrational, uninhibited and unplanned physical or cognitive activities, such as worrying (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Frydenberg & Lewis, 2000), waiting for something to happen (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980) or taking drugs or cigarettes (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000).

Previous studies have shown that (student) teachers use approaching coping activities such as preparing well for lessons, doing physical activities, gaining knowledge to manage stress, taking short-term-sick leave (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015), thinking positively (Richards, 2012), using humour and exhibiting reflective behaviours (Van der Wal et al., 2019). Keck Frei et al. (2020)

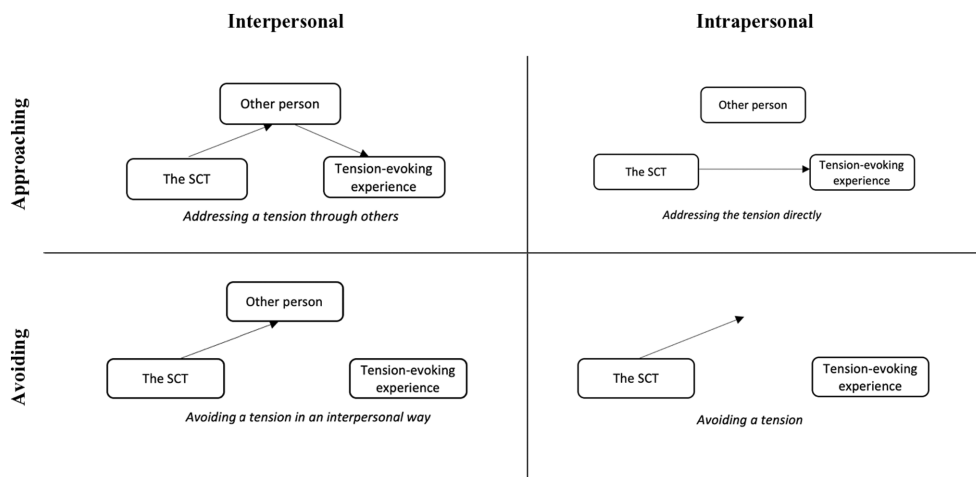


FIGURE 1 Visualization of approaching–avoiding and interpersonal–intrapersonal coping strategies.

claimed that SCTs appear to be highly self-regulated and, because of their life experiences, better able to remain calm when facing obstacles or conflicts.

Approaching strategies are more often used for situations that are seen as changeable, while avoiding strategies appear to be used more frequently in perceived unchangeable or threatening situations (Austin et al., 2005; Folkman et al., 1986; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Perrez & Reicherts, 1992; Perrez & Reichert 1992) to reduce stress reactions in the short run (Roth & Cohen, 1986; Suls & Fletcher, 1985). Approaching coping strategies seem to have a beneficial effect on psychological distress levels (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013). In contrast, teachers using avoiding strategies, such as cognitive and behavioural disengagement, reported higher levels of stress (Griffith et al., 1999).

Inter- versus intrapersonal coping strategies

Another classification of coping strategies found in the literature is *interpersonal* versus *intrapersonal* strategies. Interpersonal coping strategies are characterized by using social contacts as a source to manage a problem or emotion, while intrapersonal coping strategies can be seen as a way of managing problems and emotions without the involvement of others. Interpersonal coping strategies mentioned in other studies include asking for advice and accepting help (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Van der Wal et al., 2019). Identified intrapersonal coping strategies are reducing ambition (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015), self-reflecting (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980) and challenging oneself (Botwinik, 2007).

Interpersonal as well as intrapersonal coping strategies have their own advantages and disadvantages. Interpersonal coping strategies appear to be effective (Mundia et al., 2016); however, it should be considered that people may differ in their desired social support (Boekaerts, 2002). Intrapersonal coping strategies, on the other hand, can be deployed immediately without the help of others (Griffith et al., 1999). Mundia et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of intrapersonal, internal coping sources that enable someone to resolve problems autonomously.

There is evidence that people generally use less social support when their tensions are related to self-esteem, probably because of feelings of shame (Folkman et al., 1986). Social support and help-seeking are coping strategies often used by teachers (Richards, 2012; Van der Wal et al., 2019). Moreover, (student) teachers who mention low social support at work report higher levels of stress than teachers who use social support to manage situations (Griffith et al., 1999; Murray-Harvey et al., 2000). Bar-Tal et al. (2020) showed that the availability of support was the most powerful factor contributing to SCTs' job satisfaction.

Research questions

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the coping strategies used by SCTs to manage the tensions they encounter. We expect that this knowledge contributes to a better understanding of why SCTs dropout and that, in return, this can also help to prevent SCTs from leaving the training programme. Our research question was as follows: Which coping strategies do SCTs use during their training, and how do they perceive the nature, outcomes and evolution of the coping strategies? To answer this question, four sub-questions were formulated.

- Which coping strategies do SCTs use when entering education during their training?
- Which coping strategies are perceived to be SCT-specific?
- Which coping strategies do SCTs deem helpful and unhelpful as a teacher?
- How does the use of these coping strategies develop?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

Despite the wide variety of quantitative measurement tools (Garcia, 2010; Greenglass et al., 1999; Hobfoll et al., 1994; Labrague et al., 2017) to operationalize the concept of coping, we found a qualitative approach of data collection more appropriate for answering the research questions. This because coping appears to be a rapidly fluctuating process, and gaining insight into these processes requires staying as close as possible to their real-time occurrence (Tennen et al., 2000).

To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to describe the specific coping strategies SCTs use during their teacher training by linking these strategies directly to the tension-evoking moment. Therefore, we used pre-structured logbooks to ask SCTs to detail the tension-evoking moment and, subsequently, the corresponding coping strategy used to manage the tension. We qualitatively studied a group of 24 SCTs following an alternative teacher training programme. We aimed to explore and describe in detail the coping strategies used by these SCTs. To enhance the outcomes' validity and reliability, we used multiple sources of data (Flick, 2018): logbooks completed at various times during the training and interviews.

Context

This study was conducted from January 2021 to July 2022. SCTs following an alternative teacher training programme (ATTP) at the University of Amsterdam participated in this study. The duration of this training programme is 1.5 years with the option to use additional time—up to 6 months—to complete the programme. This programme's lectures are scheduled over four full-time weeks spread over a year, and eight evening lectures during the first year of training and six evening lectures during the second year. Simultaneously, students work in a school for at least two half-days.

In the Netherlands, SCTs can apply for a scholarship, under the condition that they will also be employed as a paid teacher affiliated with a school. This means that training at the university and induction in schools are simultaneous. The school, student and university sign a/an (tripartite) agreement concerning training and coaching arrangements.

Before SCTs may enter the training programme, a mandatory assessment evaluates the suitability of the candidate for this training and the teaching profession. This mandatory assessment is preceded by pre-assessment training comprising 2 days of school visits and two lectures at the university so that candidates can make informed decisions about this possible career move. Out of 44 participants following this pre-assessment procedure, 36 candidates participated in an assessment, and 29 candidates decided to start the ATTP. Three of these students quit the programme within 8 weeks because of financial reasons, family issues or the absence of traineeships, and two participants chose not to participate in this research. After 6 months of study, two SCTs decided to stop training, and another student also stopped after 1.5 years of training.

The programme began in the middle of the academic year, and, because of COVID-19, in the first weeks, most students needed to provide and follow online classes or classes in hybrid form (with online and live students). During the last year of this study, COVID-19 measures were suspended in schools and universities.

Participants

Twenty-four SCTs in the ATTP at the University of Amsterdam participated in the study. These SCTs aspired to become teachers of mathematics, physics, economics, computer science or chemistry. This group included nine women and 15 men. At the start of the training, most students were

new to the profession, while others had already held a job as an uncertified teacher for a maximum of 7 months. Most SCTs decided to follow the training in hybrid form while keeping their other job (see Table 1). These jobs, or former jobs, were highly diverse (e.g., coach, IT specialist, pharmacist and so forth).

At the end of the research period, after 18 months of training, three students quit the training, nine SCTs finished their training as qualified teachers while 12 students continued their studies.

Regarding the age of the participants, the youngest was 30 at the end of the research period, while the oldest was 68. The rest of the students were either between 40 and 50 ($n=8$) or between 51 and 61 years old ($n=14$).

All participants, including the students who had quit training, were informed about the nature of this study and gave active consent to participate in this research. The study was approved by the ethics review board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the University of Amsterdam. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity.

Data collection

This study used logbooks, which allowed these SCTs to reflect on their development. This study covered three semesters, each lasting 6 months. The logbooks were submitted halfway through and at the end of each term. To gain a proper view of the SCTs' coping strategies for managing tensions, we designed pre-structured logbooks in which SCTs were invited to describe a stressful encounter, then the coping strategies used to manage it. The logbooks were presented and explained during a lecture, and students were asked to submit multiple pre-structured logbook fragments per submission.

After 6 months of study, the students' feedback prompted the teacher educators to ask them to describe tension-evoking experiences as well as energizing moments in their logbooks, which reduced the number of fragments useful for this study (see Table 2).

To gain deeper insight into the SCTs' meta-perspectives on the coping strategies used, we conducted two interviews during this research period, after 0.5 years ($n=24$) and 1.5 years ($n=22$) of training. SCTs could indicate their preference for an online or live interview. During the interviews, students were asked to describe what coping strategies they perceived to be helpful or less helpful for their professional development, whether their way of coping had changed since the start of the training and which strategies they perceived to be SCT-specific. The average duration of those interviews was 53 min (range: 28–76 min). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

We deductively coded logbook data in Atlas-Ti9. Coping strategies were categorized into approaching or avoiding and interpersonal or intrapersonal ways of coping (Bryman, 2016) by linking the strategy to the corresponding tension. Tensions were classified as related to starter or trainee status, the complexity of the profession, ideals related to the educational context, the SCTs' learning route and lack of time and uncertainty about the future (Van Heijst et al., under review). The SCTs'

TABLE 1 Demographic data participants.

At the start of the training programme		Working hours per week outside the educational field				
New to the profession	Already a teacher (uncertified)	0	1–10	11–20	21–30	31–40
20	4	11	1	2	4	6

meta-perspectives obtained from the interviews were categorized into helpful strategies, unhelpful strategies, the development of coping strategies during training/induction and SCT-specific coping strategies.

The first author coded all the logbook data submitted in April '21 and June '22 (=37.3% of all logbooks) to look for coping strategies used by students early and later in the training programme. An overview of the codes and quotations obtained from Atlas-ti was shared with the co-authors, and doubtful categories and codes, including the corresponding raw data, were discussed. Following the discussion the first author revised the codebook. The final version of the codebook was used to code the remainder of the logbooks. Examples of coded fragments can be found in the results sections; fragments were selected that best illustrate the code.

During the analysis process, Atlas-ti was used to see how often certain coping strategies were used by SCTs and the number of SCTs seeing certain coping strategies as helpful, unhelpful, developing over time and as being SCT-specific. *Code co-occurrence tables* were generated to relate the coping strategies to the corresponding tension-evoking moments and *code-document tables* were used to gain insight in the use of certain coping strategies over time. The information from these tables were transferred to Excel to determine relative values. This enabled better interpretation of the raw data because of the skewed distribution of the number of logbook fragments submitted throughout the year.

RESULTS

Coping strategies and the link with tensions

It is important to know what tensions SCTs are coping with when investigating their coping strategies. In [Table 3](#), we explore how coping strategies related to the tensions the SCTs experienced. The displayed percentages in the rows of this table (alongside the counts) illustrates the distribution of the employed coping strategies to manage a specific tension while the percentages in the columns of the table (under the counts) show the distribution of a specific coping strategy used to manage various tensions. However, the table also demonstrates the difficulty of seeing patterns in this format. Therefore, in the largest part of this article, we abstract from the tensions to which coping strategies respond, approaching these tensions as the context in which we study coping strategies without focusing on the tensions themselves.

[Table 3](#) also shows that the SCTs used multiple coping strategies simultaneously or consecutively to manage a tension, as evidenced by the number of coping strategies used by the SCTs outnumbering the tension-evoking moments. The SCTs employed intrapersonal approaching (63%), interpersonal approaching (28%) and intrapersonal avoiding strategies (9%). Interpersonal avoiding strategies were not mentioned by the SCTs in this study. These coping strategies are elaborated on in detail in the sections below.

Nature, outcomes and evolution of the coping strategies used by SCTs

In the subsections below, we discuss what each studied coping strategy entails and to what extent SCTs perceive the strategy as SCT-specific and useful for their development. Each section concludes by describing the evolution of the coping strategies' usage over time (see [Figure 2](#)).

Interpersonal approaching coping strategies

Interpersonal approaching coping strategies manage tensions through the intervention of another person. These strategies were used by almost all the SCTs ($n=22$). We distinguished three types of

TABLE 2 Number of logbook fragments used in this study.

	LB 1 April 2021 (4 months)	LB 2 June 2021 (6 months)	LB 3 Nov 2021 (start) (10 months)	LB 4 Dec 2021 (end) (12 months)	LB 5 March 2022 (15 months)	LB 6 June 2022 (18 months)
Submitted fragments	103	104	53	61	42	52
Submitted by #	23	21	17	19	18	19
Average fragments/SD ^a	4.4/1.8	4.9/1.4	3.1/1.3	3.2/1.5	2.3/0.6	2.7/1.1

^aAverage number of participants who submitted fragments followed by the standard deviation.

TABLE 3 Coping strategies (numbers and percentages) mentioned in the logbooks used to manage a specific tension.

Tensions	Interpersonal approaching		Intrapersonal approaching				Intrap. avoid.	
	Consulting within the school context (109 ^a)	Consulting outside the school context (21 ^a)	Asking others for help (10 ^a)	Considering issues (25 ^a)	Problem-resolving actions (241 ^a)	Changing mental image (58 ^a)	Avoiding actions (47 ^a)	Total
Trainee or novice teacher status	16 ^{29%} 15%	2 ^{4%} 10%	0 ^{0%} 0%	0 ^{0%} 0%	22 ^{39%} 9%	8 ^{14%} 14%	8 ^{14%} 17%	100%
Complexity of the teaching profession	72 ^{23%} 66%	7 ^{2%} 33%	3 ^{1%} 30%	13 ^{4%} 52%	162 ^{52%} 67%	27 ^{9%} 46%	26 ^{9%} 55%	100%
Discrepancy between ideals and reality	7 ^{16%} 6%	2 ^{4%} 10%	1 ^{2%} 10%	4 ^{9%} 16%	21 ^{47%} 9%	5 ^{11%} 9%	5 ^{11%} 11%	100%
Failure of learning route to meet needs	10 ^{23%} 9%	3 ^{7%} 14%	1 ^{2%} 10%	2 ^{5%} 8%	15 ^{35%} 6%	7 ^{16%} 12%	5 ^{12%} 11%	100%
Lack of time and uncertainty of future	4 ^{7%} 4%	7 ^{12%} 33%	5 ^{9%} 50%	6 ^{11%} 24%	21 ^{37%} 9%	11 ^{19%} 19%	3 ^{5%} 6%	100%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

^aNumber of times mentioned.

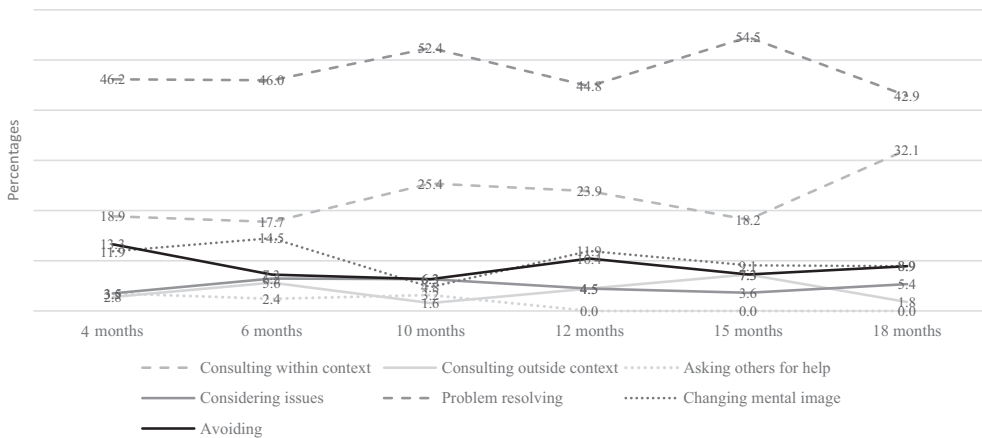


FIGURE 2 Relative percentages of the coping strategies mentioned in the logbooks per submission moment.

interpersonal approaching coping strategies. The first two types—*consulting others within the educational context* and *consulting others outside the educational context*—aim to resolve problems collaboratively to discharge emotions or evaluate one's own thoughts or actions. The third strategy type involves *asking for help*, namely asking others to act in the SCTs' place due to lack of time or competencies.

SCTs mainly consulted others within the educational context ($n = 21$), including mentors, management staff and colleagues. For example, after an emotional encounter with the mother of one of her students, Isabella reported, 'I became very emotional and cried [...] I immediately contacted my colleague [...] Thanks to her support and my team manager's support, I could let go of the situation'.

The SCTs also consulted others outside the school context ($n = 10$), such as friends, partners, their children, teacher educators and fellow students. Roxana did this when she experienced tensions because her students kept forgetting their learning supplies, 'I also discussed it at home with my daughter. She is in fourth grade, and she told me not to be so bothered by that'.

The last interpersonal approaching coping strategy consists of asking others to help by taking over tasks or doing something for the SCT ($n = 7$). The SCTs asked colleagues in school, business colleagues and relatives to take over tasks. As Dorine explained, 'I transferred some of the household tasks to other family members'.

When the SCTs were asked which coping strategies were typical for them as SCTs, they ($n = 12$) mainly mentioned competencies and characteristics that might help them cope interpersonally with tensions. Almost half ($n = 10$) of the SCTs identified themselves as communicatively skilled. After describing his success in motivating a colleague to use an innovative activity in his class, Jonathan claimed, 'I do not think, as a 24–25-year-old person, you would be able to have a conversation like this'.

During the interviews, the SCTs were asked to specify helpful and unhelpful coping strategies for their professional development. Half of the SCTs ($n = 12$) mentioned consulting colleagues in school as a useful strategy, as Arthur clarified, 'What helped me [was] talking with colleagues [...] For me, this is new. I may have grey hair, but I have never done this trick before'. The SCTs also perceived investing in relationships with colleagues by being modest ($n = 4$) as a helpful strategy, as Remy explained, '[I am] more modest than I usually am [...] That is the behaviour I chose [...] The result is [...] that they offered me a contract'. Asking for help was also mentioned to be effective ($n = 4$). For example, Adrian explained that 'parking an action with someone else' helped him in his development. Only a few SCTs ($n = 2$) described consulting others outside of the school as useful, which demonstrates the importance of the school social network for SCTs. These results are summarized in Table 4.

Regarding the evolution of coping strategy usage, results from the logbooks showed that the SCTs only asked for help during the first half year of training. Consulting others outside the context had the highest relative score after 15 months but was no longer mentioned after 18 months, while

TABLE 4 SCTs' meta-perspective concerning the interpersonal approaching coping strategies mentioned in the interviews.

	Helpful strategies	Unhelpful strategies	Evolution during training
Consulting others within the educational context	Consulting others in school ($n = 12$) Investing in relationships by being modest ($n = 4$)		Consulting others more often ($n = 5$)
Consulting others outside the educational context	Consulting others outside school ($n = 2$)		
Asking for help	Asking for help ($n = 2$)	Not asking for help ($n = 3$)	

consulting others within the educational context was most often later in the training programme (see Figure 2). Logbook descriptions suggested that the SCTs consulted their mentors more often (20 times) than consulting others (seven times) during the first 3 months after the start of the training, while after half a year, they consulted other colleagues more often than they consulted their mentor.

During the interviews, the SCTs confirmed using interpersonal coping strategies in school more often as time passed (see Table 4). Ally explained this phenomenon, 'In my previous job, I was used to being the one who decides and to whom people came to spar'.

Intrapersonal approaching coping

Every SCT ($n=24$) used intrapersonal approaching strategies, which are intended to reduce a tension by approaching it directly without intervention from others. We found three intrapersonal approaching strategies. First, the SCTs undertook actions to resolve a problem. Second, the SCTs changed their thinking about situations with the aim of staying motivated or keeping faith. Third, when the SCTs were not yet sure which approach was the best to use, they considered issues related to the tension-evoking situation. Using this last strategy helps them to understand the situation and be better prepared for it in the future.

Problem-resolving actions were the most used coping strategies by all SCTs to resolve problems in the classroom (mentioned 183 times). As an example, Dave explained his response when students could not follow his instructions, 'During the lesson [...] I started helping students at a different [easier] level'. However, the SCTs were also solution-oriented regarding situations outside the classroom. Within the school, SCTs used problem-resolving actions to change procedural aspects within the school, and to fulfil their needs as a (student) teacher. Problem-resolving actions intended to make a difference in organizational aspects of schools caused SCTs to switch from novice teachers to their expert roles. Yolanda described the deployment of her role as a chairperson when the management of her school had decided to reduce the number of hours available for her subject:

I asked [the team manager] how financial and educational interests are weighted in such a situation. In turn the team manager invited the logistics guy because he has the overview. In preparation we asked for student population projections. When we met in the science classroom, I put the numbers on the board of the class. [...] I, unconsciously, fell into my familiar chairperson role.

Richard used problem-resolving actions to express his needs regarding the learning route when his mentor intervened during class, 'I discussed it afterwards with my mentor. She understood my frustration and told me that it was indeed not very [...] collegial of her to interfere with my class'.

Almost all the SCTs ($n=20$) deployed the strategy of *changing their thinking* on a regular basis. Roxana described applying this strategy when only six students submitted their formative assessment, 'In the end, I thought, "At least six students have made the effort to do their task"'. The SCTs used the strategy of *considering issues* ($n=12$) to understand a tension-evoking moment. Ally explained that after a heated discussion with her mentor, 'At home, I tried [...] to analyse what happened'.

In terms of coping strategies that respondents considered as SCT-specific, the interviews showed that some SCTs ($n=5$) believed they could cope with tensions in a more autonomous and independent way compared to their younger colleagues. Adrian gave the following explanation, 'My first job [...] was on a drilling rig. [...] I was there alone or with one colleague. One was sleeping and the other was working, or vice versa. And then you are on your own, and when you have a problem, you must resolve it'. The SCTs also saw themselves as people who know how to put things in perspective ($n=18$). Arthur mentioned that '20 years of life experience does help [...] dealing with changes and stress. I have seen a lot of crazy things so I will not be shocked when things go differently than expected'.

TABLE 5 SCTs' meta-perspective concerning the intrapersonal approaching coping strategies mentioned in the interviews.

	Helpful strategies	Unhelpful strategies	Evolution during training
Problem-resolving actions in the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being consequent ($n=8$) Showing flexibility ($n=4$) Preparing lessons well ($n=1$) Not being overly helpful ($n=2$) Investing in relationships with students ($n=2$) Ignoring as pedagogy ($n=2$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not being consequent ($n=2$) No flexibility and desire for too much control ($n=5$) Planning too much course content ($n=3$) Being overly helpful ($n=3$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Became stricter ($n=2$) Became more flexible ($n=1$) Knew what subject matter to cover ($n=2$) Offered shorter individual instructions ($n=1$) Revealed themselves to students ($n=2$)
Problem-resolving actions outside the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating time ($n=10$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overextending oneself ($n=6$) Relinquishing control ($n=5$) Becoming too involved while being a teacher is not a proper choice ($n=1$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Became more proactive ($n=1$) Acted how they desired to act ($n=2$)
Changing mental images	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Putting matters into perspective ($n=8$) Exhibiting self-compassion ($n=3$) Being a student yourself ($n=1$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking matters too personally ($n=1$) Having overly high expectations of colleagues ($n=1$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cared less about what other people think ($n=2$) Exhibited more self-compassion ($n=3$)
Considering issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflecting ($n=5$) 		

When the SCTs were asked to mention helpful and unhelpful coping strategies, they only mentioned *problem-resolving actions* inside the classroom that appear to prevent tension-evoking moments from occurring instead of coping strategies to manage tensions. Acting consequently ($n=10$), responding flexibly ($n=9$), not being overly helpful towards students ($n=4$), preparing lessons well ($n=3$), investing in relationships with students ($n=2$) and ignoring as pedagogical approach ($n=2$) were mentioned. Outside the classroom, more than half of the SCTs mentioned the importance of managing their time and tasks by not saying 'yes' to everything ($n=13$) and maintaining control over their range of tasks ($n=5$). Yolanda explained that her enthusiasm evoked problems, 'I need to be careful because I can work myself into the ground. Purely out of enthusiasm'. *Changes in thinking*, such as relativise and letting things go ($n=8$) and practising self-compassion ($n=3$) were perceived as helpful coping strategies. Yolanda explained her relativism, 'I think in general I have been relatively good at not taking it all personally [...] so you can distance yourself more easily so that you stay out of your emotions'. Additionally, Richard described his self-compassion, 'All the things I must do. All these goals I must achieve [...] I have turned must do into wanting to do.' To conclude, SCTs perceived considering issues through reflection to be helpful ($n=5$), as Robert explained, 'Reflection and evaluation, those were words that annoyed me in the past [...] but that is what I do when I go home and when my class did not go well.'

Regarding the evolution of approaching intrapersonal coping strategies, results from the logbooks demonstrated that the use of problem-resolving actions fluctuated marginally over time. The strategy of considering issues also fluctuated over time, while changing mental images was most often used after 6 months of training (see [Figure 2](#)).

The interviews showed (see [Table 5](#)) that SCTs obtained a clearer picture of appropriate actions (pedagogical and didactical) inside the classroom that prevent tensions from occurring, (e.g., they became stricter). They also mentioned acting more in accordance with their own vision without caring what others think. These ways of acting mentioned by SCTs are not coping strategies to manage tension-evoking moments, but they rather are ways of acting that prevent some tension-evoking moments from occurring.

Intrapersonal avoiding coping

Intrapersonal avoiding coping strategies were also used by the SCTs ($n=17$) to avoid a tension evoked by a situation or a person. The SCTs avoided tensions by ignoring them or by acting intentionally in ways that did not contribute to resolving the tension. These tensions mostly related to the complexity of the teaching profession (mentioned 27 times) when the SCTs were not yet able to respond appropriately to the situation. As an example, Tiffany described a case in which she was losing her students' attention during her instruction, 'I continue my instruction, but I feel I am losing the class. I feel a slight panic rising in me, but I do not show it'. In this case, the apparent purposes of her avoiding strategy were to weather the tension-evoking moment and to get past it. The SCTs also tended to avoid situations when experiencing problems with their mentor (mentioned eight times). Ally described this when she felt reprimanded by her mentor, 'During the conversation I said nothing. I was totally overwhelmed by her reaction [...] I blocked [it] completely'.

Conspicuously, avoiding strategies were mostly used in conjunction with interpersonal and intrapersonal approaching coping strategies (e.g., asking a friend for advice or analysing this situation). Only one person used the avoiding coping strategy quite often in isolation. This student stopped the teacher training programme after 18 months.

During the interviews, avoiding strategies were only mentioned as not being useful ($n=7$) (see [Table 6](#)). The SCTs listed being unreasonable, concealing their needs or prematurely quitting work at a school as strategies that negatively influenced their development. As Eddy said, 'There is no point in yelling here in the house, is there? Against my wife'.

Avoiding strategies appear to have been mainly used early in the training programme (see [Figure 2](#)).

TABLE 6 SCTs' meta-perspective concerning the intrapersonal avoiding coping strategies mentioned in the interviews.

	Helpful strategies	Unhelpful strategies	Evolution during training
Avoiding situations		Having an emotional outburst ($n=3$) Ignoring or postponing things ($n=2$) Ignoring their desires and needs ($n=2$) Prematurely stopping work at a school ($n=1$)	

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Conclusion

Learning to teach is always accompanied by feelings of tension (Pillen et al., 2013). These tensions can be sources of growth when student teachers effectively cope with them (Caspari-Gnann & Sevian, 2022) but can cause dropout when teachers do not. Whereas previous research has focused on first-career teachers' (FCTs') coping strategies, this study focused on which coping strategies SCTs use during their training, and how they perceive the nature outcomes and evolution of the coping strategies. To the best of our knowledge, our study was the first to study the coping strategies that SCTs used when encountering tensions during their training and induction in education. Our study also reveals SCTs' perceptions about the coping strategies they considered specific to SCTs and which strategies they found helpful.

Results show that the SCTs mainly used intrapersonal approaching strategies, namely problem-resolving actions, changing mental images and considering issues. SCTs also used interpersonal approaching strategies, specifically consulting others within or outside the school or asking for help. The least-mentioned coping strategies were intrapersonal avoiding strategies while interpersonal avoiding strategies were not mentioned at all.

SCTs used problem-resolving actions, an intrapersonal approaching strategy, during their entire training, while the use of the other strategies developed over time. Interpersonal approaching strategies were most common later in training, while avoiding strategies were used relatively often early in the training programme.

SCTs found several intrapersonal coping strategies, such as consistent behaviour towards students or putting matters in perspective, particularly helpful. However, these are actions which prevent tensions from occurring, rather than coping strategies. These actions can therefore be considered as preventive coping strategies (McCarthy et al., 2010). Interpersonal approaching strategies were also said to be useful, while avoiding strategies were mentioned as not useful strategies.

The SCTs mentioned several of their characteristics that made some coping strategies more accessible to them: Knowing how to develop ideas independently and being able to put matters into perspective contribute to the associated intrapersonal approaching strategies. Well-developed communication skills contributed to interpersonal approaching methods of coping.

More specifically there were three key findings which we will discuss in the subsections below: (1) SCTs create their own social network, (2) Intrapersonal approaching strategies may be useful and risky simultaneously and (3) Avoiding strategies serve a purpose.

Discussion

Second-career student teachers seek their own sources of learning within the social network of school

It is notable that during the first period of training, SCTs were least likely to consult colleagues within the school. In contrast, later in training, they most often consulted these colleagues as an interpersonal strategy. Explanations for this development may be found in the socialization process of SCTs in

school—from peripheral to central participation—and in the importance of the social network for the SCTs' development and reason to stay in education (Coppe et al., 2022; Hogg et al., 2023). This socialization process probably also applies to FCTs, however, the importance of interactions within the schools' social network appears to be a SCT-specific element. Previous studies show that the social network and professional interactions in school are more important for the development of SCTs than it appears to be for FCTs because the SCTs' socialization process is mainly on the job (Coppe et al., 2022). Our study shows that SCTs consciously choose people for their social network in school and do not limit themselves to their mentors. Bar-Tal et al. (2020) already discussed the willingness of SCTs to create their own supportive environment when the school does not meet their needs and Coppe et al. (2022) demonstrated the importance of access to direct and indirect colleagues for the SCTs' development.

Intrapersonal coping strategies, useful and risky

The SCTs mainly used intrapersonal approaching strategies, that is, approaching tensions without the intervention of another person, which aligns with previous research on early career teachers (Van der Wal et al., 2019). Presumably, this behaviour was mainly elicited by the fact that the teaching profession requires constant *ad hoc* decision-making and direct action (Van Heijst et al., *under review*). Approaching problems in an intrapersonal way can therefore be seen as a part of the normal work of all teachers rather than a deliberate coping strategy (Griffith et al., 1999).

However, SCTs also mentioned an intrapersonal approaching coping strategy that seemed SCT-specific. When they think that school management adopts the wrong approach at an organizational level, SCTs assume the role of change agents, using their previously acquired skills and knowledge to initiate changes in the school (Trent, 2018). It is plausible that SCTs discern inadequate processes in school and possess the skills to change them.

Approaching strategies have the reputation of being useful because of their beneficial effect on stress (Fisher, 2011; Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013). Our study confirms that those strategies are helpful when they are interpersonal in nature. However, when they are of an intrapersonal nature, they might not always be helpful because they imply that the student copes with the problem independently (Griffith et al., 1999). This strategy may ensure that SCTs' struggles remain unknown because they are invisible to others in the environment. As a result, potential ways to resolve struggles remain unaddressed which could increase stress and dropout risk.

Avoiding strategies serve a purpose

Avoiding intrapersonal strategies are mainly used early in the training programme. Those strategies are often associated with negative psychological well-being (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013). This was confirmed in our study for situations where SCTs coped in an avoiding way when experiencing problems with their mentors. However, early in the training, avoiding strategies were mainly used to cope with the complexity of the teaching profession. Therefore, avoiding a tension-evoking moment does not inherently lead to negative psychological well-being but can also help SCTs endure and subsequently reflect on a tension-evoking moment. This method of coping can be seen as a helpful way to compensate for an initial lack of competence. Thus, knowing when a particular coping strategy is deployed and relating it to the tension for which it is used is important to establish the helpfulness of a certain coping strategy.

Limitations and implications for further research and practice

Coping is a complex phenomenon influenced by SCTs' personal characteristics (Boekaerts, 2002) and earlier experiences (Tigchelaar et al., 2008). For getting insight in the coping strategies used by SCTs,

we depended on the reflective skills of these students. A student with well-developed reflection skills is probably better able to clearly describe their coping strategies than students who find it difficult to reflect or articulate their reflection on article. This disparity may have caused bias in the results. However, most SCTs showed good reflection skills and thanks to the large quantity of logbooks ($n = 312$), we consider that we acquired a comprehensive overview of the different coping strategies SCTs use. Moreover, the strategies mentioned by students who had trouble reflecting matched the strategies mentioned in the logbooks of the other students.

Another limitation of our study is that we only took the perspectives of SCTs themselves into account. To gain deeper insight into how to help SCTs manage the tensions they encounter, future research should also focus on the perception of actors in the social (school) environment who work with SCTs.

A practical insight that can be derived from this study is that schools should be aware that SCTs, and probably other student teachers as well, mainly use intrapersonal coping strategies, which may remain invisible to the environment. However, it has been shown that the interpersonal aspect—which is socially oriented—is very important for the SCTs' development (Coppe et al., 2022). Therefore, schools and ATTPs should stimulate SCTs to use interpersonal ways of coping. In school, this can be achieved by initiating meetings and discussions between SCTs and various colleagues. Such meetings might help SCTs to feel welcome in school as a full-fledged member (Coppe et al., 2023) and ensure that SCTs can learn from colleagues. Meetings and discussion initiated by ATTPs might support SCTs to identify their previously acquired skills and knowledge, discuss their usefulness in education and to utilize them—if applicable—in a beneficial way (Den Hertog et al., 2023) to cope with the tensions they encounter during their professional development as a teacher.

Ultimately, we believe that our findings can contribute to the practice of teacher educators in schools and training institutions, supporting SCTs in coping with tensions and reducing the likelihood of SCTs' dropout.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ilona van Heijst: Conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; visualization; writing – original draft; investigation; methodology; project administration; software; validation. **Monique Volman:** Conceptualization; formal analysis; writing – review and editing; methodology; supervision; validation; investigation. **Frank Cornelissen:** Conceptualization; formal analysis; writing – review and editing; methodology; supervision; validation; investigation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study is approved by the ethical board by the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of the University of Amsterdam (2021-CDE-13111).

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