Teacher Education for Transformative Agency

Critical perspectives
on design, content
and pedagogy

EDITORS

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Introduction: Purpose, outline and contribution of the book

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Background and purpose of the book

One of the most important challenges in South Africa since the advent of democracy in 1994 has been to enhance the provision and quality of education for all. Yet while there has been much progress in increasing the number of young people attending school, stark systemic challenges and inadequate remedying of the apartheid legacies of separation and inequality remain pervasive (Christie, 2018).

A range of education policies have been introduced over the years in an attempt to address these concerns. Sayed, Carrim, Badroodien, McDonald and Singh (2018) outline in detail the development of these policies as they relate to teacher education. A contributing factor to policy re-development was the review of professional programmes in Education, undertaken in 2006 by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The report on this process described some key

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findings relating to initial teacher education programmes, one of which was weak programme design (CHE, 2010).[1] Following this process, the *Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* (MRTEQ) (DHET, 2011, revised 2015) was published as national policy to address the critical challenges that education in South Africa faced – especially the concerns about weak content and conceptual knowledge found amongst teachers.

MRTEQ identifies different types of knowledge that underpin teachers' practice and that need to be part of an initial teacher education programme. Five types of learning are identified and associated with the acquisition, integration and application of knowledge for teaching, namely: disciplinary, pedagogical, practical, fundamental and situational learning. Each of these learning types is explained in the policy, together with information about subject knowledge, pedagogical strategies, the world of practice, languages and information and communication technology (ICT), and the varied learning situations found in the country. The expectation is that teachers should be able to draw reflexively from these different forms of knowledge to work in an integrated and applied manner. The policy also emphasises the need for teachers to learn to work in ways that address the lingering effects of apartheid and to develop competences to deal with diversity, inclusivity and environmental sustainability. Professional ethics and the development of professional attitudes and values are also seen as key elements of teacher education.

The MRTEQ policy foregrounds knowledge, reflection, connection, synthesis and research in its conceptualisation of teacher educators' work. As such, it provides an overall structure for learning programmes at the same time as allowing for institutional flexibility and discretion in the final design. It encourages teacher educators to become engaged in communities of practice working towards curriculum design, policy implementation and research.

Against this policy background, a newly designed Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) was implemented in the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University in 2018. This gave lecturers the impetus for critical reflection on the purpose, structure and content of their modules, a process that led to the key question of this book, namely: How (can) do we prepare teachers for South Africa at this time?

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1   The following terminology is used interchangeably in the book: teacher educators/lecturers; pre-service teachers/ student teachers. It should also be noted that primary and high school students are referred to as 'learners' in South Africa.

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The book is the product of many months of deliberation and critical reflection by colleagues teaching on the PGCE programme. Workshops were held where lecturers could engage with the structure and conceptual framework of the programme as a whole, as well as of their particular module. This culminated in a symposium at the South African Education Research Association (SAERA) conference in Pretoria in 2018, as lecturers examined how curriculum design unfolds across disciplines in the programme, and crucially, the commonalities in the presentation of course material.

Each chapter in the book deals with theoretical frameworks that underpin the thinking and practices of these teacher educators. Using research-based and self-study methodologies, chapters include a description of the content and pedagogy of a particular module, its deeper educational purpose, conception of knowledge for teaching, and connection to the wider frame of educational transformation and social justice. In keeping with the reflexive exploration of their work, authors ask: How do I work with this in my practice? To answer this question, authors deliberate on the hopes, frustrations, complexities and dilemmas of their work, as they seek to enact particular educational goals in their teaching.

A number of key principles informed the process of deliberation. These included:

◄   How to navigate within teacher education from the ravages of apartheid education to inclusive, democratic practices that address the developmental needs of the majority of our citizens.

◄   The desire to move out of academic 'silos' and to work across subjects and departments to build a shared understanding of the programme.

◄   How to ensure structural and conceptual coherence across the programme, while allowing lecturers the academic freedom to engage students critically within their discipline.

◄   How to engage with the demands of knowledge-building in the twenty-first century

◄   How to integrate different forms of knowledge across the curriculum.

Two frames of reference were helpful in constructing the discourse. The first was that of Productive Pedagogies (Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard, 2006), with its four dimensions of intellectual quality, connectedness, a supportive classroom environment and working with and valuing difference. Second, the idea of Hordern (2018:787) that: "it is important to make the distinction between knowledge *about* education and knowledge *for* educational practice," was engaged with during discussions. As can be seen in the chapters, these

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frames of reference took on different shapes in the final module designs, with lecturers drawing to a greater or lesser extent on the key concepts of these theories.

An outline of the chapters

At Stellenbosch University the PGCE is a one-year full-time teaching qualification that follows on from an undergraduate degree, and which is aimed at prospective high school teachers. Students register for eight compulsory generic subjects, and one or two teaching specialisation subjects. They spend about eight weeks on school-based observation and practice.

The book follows the logic of the programme structure and is divided into three sections. **Section A** focuses on a selection of the generic modules in the PGCE, or those compulsory modules that every student follows. **Section B** is devoted to a selection of subject-specific modules, the choice of which is dependent on the school subjects that the student intends to teach. **Section C** is the only chapter not written by a full-time member of staff at Stellenbosch University; it has the purpose of reflecting on broader historical, political and pedagogical issues emerging from the book and identifying further work that needs to be done.

In the first chapter of Section A, Maureen Robinson draws on the notion of educational virtuosity to discuss **Practical Learning,** a module that includes both university-based lectures and school placements. While the immediate aim of this module is to advance student teacher professional learning, it has the more fundamental purpose of embedding practical tools for classroom practice within situated judgement and ethical agency, and within an understanding of social forces. The chapter describes the design and pedagogy of the module, and reports on research into students' experiences of their preparation for a diversity of learners and a range of social contexts. The chapter then considers if and how the lectures and the school observation impacted on students' own sense of agency within the diverse and unequal contexts of South African schools.

Karlien Conradie maps some of the central and linking aspects underlying the learning relationship in her module, **Psychology of Education**. These include emotional security (trust), healthy psychological boundaries, interconnectedness, individuation and attachment security. She argues that a caring, receptive disposition starts from the premise that humans are inherently relational, responsive beings. She sees the human condition as one

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of connectedness and interdependence where people experience themselves in relation to others, but individual psychological and social boundaries are not dismissed. Having described in detail the rationale for the module, Conradie explains how on its completion, teacher students should have critical insight into the developmental dimensions of adolescence. The interaction between development and the learning process is explored here together with discussion of influences on teaching practice, including effective mediation and support of diverse learning abilities.

Marie Louise Botha uses the lens of the module **Curriculum Studies** to revisit teaching and learning (curriculum) in teacher education, and to ask what is in store for the twenty-first century. Based on her experience of students struggling to critically engage with content, she looks at the curriculum of the module to determine its alignment with the demands and needs of the 'new generation' student cohort. She links this self-reflection to the goal of promoting engaged and informed citizen-teachers who are able to contribute positively within the unpredictable future of a global pandemic, economic inequality and environmental challenges.

Jerome Joorst's purpose is to reflect on the content and possible outcomes of the module **Education Governance, Leadership and Management**. Following an auto-ethnographical methodology, he asks what can be learnt from the pedagogical design of the module in terms of preparing students for the realities of teaching. Joorst argues that the demands of what good teachers should look like, coupled with complexities in the histories and current education realities of the country, with its continuing two-tiered and unequal education system, places heavy demands on teacher education. He outlines the daily, lived experience of being a teacher educator in South Africa, including within the university's institutional culture, what is expected to be taught in the module, the identities of the students and how non-traditional academics in the university do their teaching. He then elaborates on three emerging challenges in his work, namely working in a regulative environment, knowing who we teach and how they learn, and deciding what knowledge to include in the course. In so doing, Joorst is able to become conscious of how his students engage with the module, and also how he views himself in relation to his teaching.

In the final chapter in Section A, Aslam Fataar and Jennifer Feldman reflect on the module **History and Sociology of Education**, arguing that learning to become a professional teacher involves not only what the students are learning, but also who they are and who they are becoming. The authors

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discuss an assignment where students were asked to draw on the module's readings and class and tutorial discussions to consider how the life trajectories of students with different histories had positioned them in their 'becoming' as student teachers. The key argument of the chapter is that students' reflexive engagement with the module readings and discussions in relation to their own biographies supported the potential for them to begin to shift how they think about themselves in relation to their emerging 'teacherly' identity. Through this process, secondary habitus layers were being formed that have the potential to impact and change who students are becoming as pre-service teachers within the South African educational context.

Section B focuses on two subject-specific curricula within the PGCE programme. In the first, Carina America reflects on the notion of business ethics in the subject **Business Studies Teaching**. She asks the question if, and the extent to which, pre-service business teachers should be pro-active in their teaching about moral right and wrong that govern business or organisational decision-making. Using a self-study approach, she explores the integration of business ethics for pre-service business teachers within the Productive Pedagogies framework, focusing on the aspects of substantive conversation and knowledge as problematic. Her argument is that excellence in the business world presupposes a broad education that includes ethical integrity and virtuous behaviour in a business environment. Business Studies teacher educators, however, are often not critical about the capacity of the formal curriculum to mediate learning that raises questions about the conduct and decision-making of corporate businesses. Practical issues are highlighted to illustrate the importance of ethical sensitivity in the Business Studies Teaching module.

Focusing on **Science Education**, Nazeem Edwards argues that his role as a teacher educator is to develop prospective science teachers as epistemic agents in the classroom. He discusses the challenge of teaching graduates in Physics and Chemistry to recontextualise their disciplinary knowledge for the purposes of teaching. His argument is that the prospective science teacher needs pedagogical knowledge for teaching which brings together the disciplinary discourses and educational research that relates to pedagogy. He outlines his use of multiple representations as a pedagogical approach to mediate scientific knowledge. Drawing on examples of students' own classroom practice, he shows the challenges of shifting the epistemic agency of his students. Examples are provided of students who promote science as an accumulation of knowledge or as an established body of knowledge, or who have a conservative teaching approach that holds onto cognitive authority within the classroom.

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Section C was written by Marie Brennan, who acted as a critical friend during the process of writing this book. Brennan is an Extraordinary Professor in the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University, and has visited regularly from Australia to work with staff and students. She is also an adjunct professor at the University of South Australia, where she was a Dean of Education. Her work in teacher education is well known internationally and she has been active in both pedagogical research and policy analysis around curriculum for addressing educational inequality. In this chapter, she offers a problematisation about both education and teacher education's positioning in South Africa at this time. Most importantly, she challenges us all to deepen the conversation about the next phases of scholarship and practice that might emerge from the deliberations raised in these chapters.

Intended contribution

Darling-Hammond (2006) has argued that successful teacher education programmes include careful sequencing, a strong theory of learning to teach and an intersection of subjects, aggregated into a well-understood landscape of learning. At the same time, she cautions that: "… creating coherence has been difficult in teacher education because of departmental divides [and] individualistic norms" (2006:306). As a counter to the individualistic norms referred to here, the book at its very least documents an attempt to work collaboratively and productively across subjects and departments, and to share conceptual frameworks and practical teaching moments.

The second contribution of this book, we believe, is to provide insight into and respect for teacher education as academic work (Ellis & McNicholl, 2015). Green, Reid and Brennan (2017) have argued that teacher education is "struggling to thrive as an intellectual and practical endeavour in a policy context that increasingly seeks to render it as an instrumental field" (2017:39). Thus, while policymakers and politicians might at times simplify what it takes to prepare teachers for the nation, the chapters here illustrate the complexity of the task, showing how biography, policy, research, theory and practice intersect in the daily work of teacher education. The chapters also illustrate the multi-faceted (and contestable) nature of 'knowledge for teaching', thereby opening up avenues for ongoing debate and discussion.

There are many more questions to be addressed than have been raised in this book; we are fortunate that some of these are highlighted in the concluding chapter. The chapters are, to some extent, inward-looking, providing a window

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into how teacher educators in a particular place and time are grappling with their intentions and actions. Follow-up studies would be needed to ascertain any longer-term influence on student teachers' enacted professional vision and practices.

High expectations exist in South Africa for education to make a difference to the life chances of all young people, and teacher education is not released from this responsibility. Student protests in 2015 and 2016 in the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall campaigns have thrown calls for transformation in our social system into sharp relief, including focusing on the ideological and material role of education in maintaining South Africa's highly inequitable society. Indeed the imperative to address the endemic challenges of a post-apartheid education system means that: "teacher [educator] voice cannot be simply about assertion of individualistic goals, but extensions of a social and collective reconstructivist responsibility" (Samuel, 2014:619).

Like others around the world, we believe that learning to be a teacher is not just about qualification and socialisation, but also about consideration of what is educationally desirable (Biesta, 2015). We hope that, in some small way, this book may make a contribution to this purpose.

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