

Perceptions of teacher roles in an experience-rich teacher education programme

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Prospective teachers enrolling for teacher education programmes often bring with them fixed images and beliefs about the roles they see themselves fulfilling in the teaching profession. The aim of this research was to uncover, firstly, beginning student teachers' initial perceptions of the roles that they see themselves performing, and secondly, to understand how, after authentic school-based experiences, the student teachers have subsequently (re)arranged their perceptions of teacher roles. Interviews were conducted based on visual collages that the student teachers constructed and analysed by means of metaphorical lenses. We found that the teacher education programme with its strong focus on the teacher-as-self had indeed challenged some of the traditional roles that student teachers saw themselves fulfilling. One such significant change was revealed by their assertions that they cannot be sole knowledge providers but must rather be facilitators of learning, challenging students through the design of powerful learning environments to use the multiple information sources of the knowledge age. Another overwhelming role perception was that of Mother (caring and nurturing) elicited by the HIV/Aids pandemic, which would leave many learners orphaned in the Southern African context.

Keywords: pre-service teacher education; practice-theory; teacher-as-self; visual image collages; metaphorical role perceptions

Introduction

In the process of changing education in South Africa no significant attempts were made to explore the beliefs and role perceptions that student teachers hold of a professional educator. Internationally many researchers in this field such as Hollingsworth (1989), Weinstein (1990), Kagan (1992), Pajares (1992), Tatto (1998) and most recently Korthagen (2004) reiterated the existence, importance and influence of beliefs and images in teacher learning. In an effort to broaden our view on the existing deep-seated personal beliefs and images that pre-service teachers brought into an experience-rich one-year postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) programme we isolated the perceptions that pre-service teachers held of teacher roles as an indicator of professional development. Kagan, in her research review on professional growth, found that

the personal beliefs and images that pre-service candidates bring to programs of teacher education usually remain inflexible. Candidates tend to use the information provided in coursework to confirm rather than to confront and correct their pre-existing beliefs. A candidate's personal beliefs and images therefore determine how much knowledge the candidate acquires from a pre-service program and how it is interpreted. (1992, p. 154)

Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, & Wubbels (2001, p. 182) argue on changing a candidate's beliefs that little or no change takes place when alternative conceptions are only offered to teacher students in lectures. However, when student teachers are *exposed to and challenged with living through new experiences*, the process of changing their existing perceptions, they consciously

start to develop alternative perceptions of teaching (Korthagen et al., 2001, p. 182). From experience we learnt that preparing an initial teacher for the reality of transition materialises as a revolutionary educational process which is not linear or clearly defined but is instead a holistic experience of a chaotic onslaught on existing social structures, personal and group identities, personal belief systems, knowledge and competences. Analysing the dynamics of a personal transformation, relinquishing existing deeply held belief systems, seems to be a sensitive traumatic experience that needs an appropriately designed educational intervention program to encourage and support the process of becoming a professional teacher in adverse circumstances. In an existing PGCE programme context, student teachers are exposed to an intervention programme that incorporates a number of 'living through new experiences', isolating teacher role perceptions affords us the opportunity to establish their teacher role perceptions and monitor the possibility of teacher role perception change.

The aim of this research was then firstly to uncover the student teachers' initial perceptions of the roles that they see themselves performing; and secondly to understand how, after completion of the PGCE programme, the student teachers subsequently (re)arranged their perceptions of teacher roles. The construct of 'role' is explored in relation to the main research question: What contribution does the one-year school-based post-graduate teacher education programme make to the student teachers' construction of teacher role perceptions?

In this article we will give an overview of the experiences embedded in the design of the PGCE programme; discuss the usage of visual image collages for data collection and finally highlight the most significant insights gained from this research.

About the curriculum

In the PGCE curriculum 60% of the time is allocated to school-based experiences and 40% of the time to a university-based component. In the school-based component a student teacher is placed with a mentor teacher who takes on the role of a teacher educator. The student teacher is responsible for at least 40% of the mentor teachers' academic school programme (approximately three hours a day, five days a week).

As learning facilitation is a prominent module in the university-based component, it is compulsory for the student teacher to conduct action research on their learning facilitation processes in the classroom. Over and above their teaching responsibilities they also have to attend staff, parent and cluster curriculum meetings as well as professional development workshops organised by government. The paradigmatic perspective of the university-based programme favours developing student teachers as 'critical reflective practitioners' (Calderhead, 1989; Korthagen, 2004; Loughran, 1996; Schön, 1987; Tillema, 2000) through a radical socio-constructivist learning process (Richardson, 1997;

von Glasersfeld, 2001) with the formidable challenge to individually construct a practice-theory (Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting, & Whitty, 2000; Korthagen et al., 2001). In a final portrayal of their professional status at the end of the programme they defend the construction of their practice-theory using relevant video clips from their practice as evidence and motivate their practice in relation to appropriate educational philosophies, theories and related professional content knowledge in the learning area in which they specialise.

Aware of the demanding choices student teachers will face between the paradigmatic perspectives of the university-based programme and the contextual reality of the schoolbased practice, a non-negotiable inclusion in the curriculum of the university-based component is the investment of time in productive self-exploration by student teachers in an effort to contribute to the development of a professional educator identity. Bullough and Kauchak emphasise the importance of self-exploration stating that

Teacher identity – what beginning teachers believe about teaching, learning and self-as-teacher – is of vital concern to teacher education; it is the basis for meaning making and decision making ... Teacher education must begin, then, by exploring the self. (1997, p. 21)

On entering this PGCE programme one of the very first activities that the student teachers have to do is to individually create a visual collage portraying their perceptions of teacher roles. Through an introspective reflective activity of creating a visual collage followed by a sharing of their perceptions, it becomes possible to identify the existing teacher role perceptions linked to a personal educational belief system impacting on their teacher identity.

Conducting the research, two recognisable forces emerged, influencing the perceptions of student teachers of teacher roles. The first force relates to the student teachers' experienced reality of their own schooling (Feinman-Nemser, 1983; Wubbels, 1992), and as novice teachers doing the 24 weeks of teaching practice. The second force relates to the influence of the university-based programme designed to expose and challenge student teachers with 'living through new experiences' (Korthagen, 2004). Samual suggests that one way of beginning the living through experience is 'with clear recognition of the kind of heritages that students bring with them to a teacher education course' (2003, p. 307). Especially in the South African context the heritages of students are of importance as the various race groups encountered different school experiences with different teacher role manifestations. White student teachers mainly come from previous historically white schools where they are exposed to qualified teachers in a highly disciplined, authoritative, prescriptive school education system based on positivist epistemology and a behaviouristic pedagogy (Skinner, 1971, p. 118). Many African student teachers often come from previously disadvantaged schools where they were mostly exposed to un- or underqualified teachers who align their professional identity with a form of mimicry in an attempt

to 'look competent' (Mattson & Harley, 2003, p. 284). This reality is illustrated by an African student teacher during an interview:

They just ... read everything in the book and give it back because I'm from a very ... what can I say ... a disadvantaged community, where we don't have facilities. Everything is boring at school, lots of drop outs and so...

The following extract from an interview reveals behaviour patterns of teachers in African schools to be in stark contrast to what are regarded as professional norms:

The school where I was, it was a very good school but they used to whip us, jisse! My worst teacher was this other guy. When you made a mistake, he will take your hand and pew! on the table. It was horrible! It wasn't very good because he was teaching us Northern Sotho. We knew Northern Sotho so ah! He was really very terrible! He was a dictator. He just stood upright like this, if you go like this (she slumps in her seat) he hits harder... (Interview 1, Rogan, 2004, p. 67)

In spite of the new education policy and the abolishment of corporal punishment the dictator role mentality experienced by this student still exists. However, it also needs to be said that the forces of the current changing circumstances contribute to a confusion of teachers' role perceptions. Contemporary teachers are caught up in the anxieties of transition, and feelings of entrapment between the 'Old' and the 'New' ways of teaching. Carrim (2003, p. 319) indicates that teachers still lack professional autonomy and competence to fulfil what is now officially expected of them. Burdened by tedious learner assessment policies, fraught with administrative responsibilities, the overall reality of the teaching profession seems to be a negative picture.

Aware of the many complex and often contradictory forces that novice teachers may have to 'grapple' with simultaneously in the process of becoming a teacher, the prominence of negotiating and understanding their own identity and that of an educator became a prerequisite in this PGCE curriculum and prompted the research.

The research

Profile of the participants

Of the 34 student teachers enrolled for the PGCE teacher education programme, 21 were white Afrikaans-speaking, 10 white English-speaking, two coloured English-speaking and one African student, all with varying school experiences. Only two were male students. Nationally all the major higher institutions offering a PGCE programme reported a definite decline in African students choosing education as a career. The absence of African students in the one-year post-graduate teacher education programme has become a national concern and may

possibly be traced to these students' unfavourable school experiences – the physical circumstances of the schools they attended, the way the teacher role was conducted, in conjunction with the new opportunities in the world of work that are opening up through the process of affirmative action.

Having only one African student as a respondent, in this study, the scope of the perceptions is limited as all the other respondents are inclined towards a euro-centric teacher role perception. We have mechanisms in place that should change the student profile in future and attract more African students into the programme resulting in the collection of more representative data of the diverse teacher role perceptions existing in South Africa.

A methodological pathway: visual images

One access route into secondary teaching in South Africa is via the PGCE programme. Higher education institutions offering the PGCE programme are flexible in terms of the philosophy, the intended and implemented curriculum as well as the delivery mode. This being the situation frames the research as an institutional case study – a case of a radical socio-constructivist learning programme for the post-graduate certificate in education students offered by a residential university of Gauteng.

This research is primarily situated in the interpretive paradigm, drawing on qualitative methods for data generation. However, due to the pre–post nature of the research design that was required to answer the research question, we added a quantitative dimension in terms of frequency counts. We did this to get an indication of the most popular teacher roles before and after the programme and used these as a gauge of the programme impact on role perception changes. All the participants volunteered to be part of both (pre- and post-) data collection phases.

Data regarding the student teachers' initial perceptions of their roles were obtained from visual image collages that each student teacher constructed individually (Figure 1 [at the end of the article] is an example of a section of a collage).

Since 1990 educational researchers (Margolis, 2000; Novoa, 2000; Tobin, 2000) have been inquiring into the use of visual culture as part of the research process. Fischman contends that visual sources of data, drawings, cartoons and films 'constitute(s) a challenge to the blind spot created by the more traditional ways of seeing and doing research in education' (2001, p. 359). However, he acknowledges that we may be entering insecure territory with accompanying risks that, nevertheless, may be worth taking since visuals hold layers of meaning we may otherwise not encounter. In this research, however, the meanings conveyed through the visual collages were not used as a unit of analysis per se. Instead of analysing the collages each student teacher had to explain his/her collage to the interviewer in an open-ended style. The purpose of

a collage was to elicit deep reflection, innerexploration, anticipation and visioning by the student teacher to ensure that rich and thick explanations would emerge as data.

In constructing the visual collages, student teachers made use of a variety of metaphoric pictures, lines, shapes and even three-dimensional compositions to convey their role perceptions. While it was not intended to use metaphors as an avenue for understanding the student teachers' pre- and post-programme role perceptions, their presence in the collages and interviews was so prominent, that it became one of the main tools for making sense of what the student teachers wanted to convey. The seemingly 'natural' use of metaphors when student teachers talked about their future profession may be one reason why Inbar (1996) could identify 7042 metaphorical images suggested by student teachers, educators and principals in his study on metaphorical use in education. Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, and Kron (2003) maintain that metaphorical images are a way to reveal teachers' underlying beliefs and assumptions concerning education, students and their own roles in classrooms.

The student teachers received their collages with the transcribed interview back for participant checking. Once all participants were satisfied with the trustworthiness of the information disclosed to the interviewer, the transcripts were analysed for the emergence of dominant themes that could be used as coding categories. The themes were arranged into a coding scheme consisting of seven categories. All seven categories were labelled in terms of the metaphors that were used by student teachers. The next step comprised the validation of the coding scheme. Twenty per cent (seven) of the randomly selected interview data sets with the matching collage were handed to a peer checker. The peer checker was a researcher with extensive knowledge and experience of the interpretative paradigm. Twenty per cent (seven) of the randomly selected coded data sets were again handed to the peer checker. The inter-rater reliability for the data sets varied between 65 and 80%.

During the second phase of data collection each student teacher received an instrument called the Individual Profile of Perceived Educator Roles (IPPER). The instrument consisted of a summary of a particular student teacher's role perceptions, compiled from the first phase of the data collection. The IPPER was presented to each student teacher, together with her/his transcribed interview and collage. On the IPPER instrument they had to indicate (1) whether they still hold the role perceptions that they initially had, (2) whether any new roles emerged that they did not envisage during the first data collection phase, and (3) what experiences contributed to changing their initial perceptions. In hindsight, a possible shortcoming in the research design might have been the presentation to students of their initial role perceptions. This process might have inhibited the exposure of dramatic changes in their role perceptions. In repeating the research we will have to reconsider this aspect.

Results

We will illustrate the findings in an exploratory way, without any claim of generalisation to other student teachers. The aim is to draw attention to the pre-service teachers' initial perceptions of teacher roles and how these were discursively refashioned as the prospective teachers moved through the different contexts of their university-based curriculum and the three schools where they spent most of the training time. All data are used here with the permission of the participants.

Student teachers' role perceptions before commencing with the teacher education programme

The data collected during the first phase revealed seven themes. Each theme represented a role that the pre-service teachers saw themselves fulfilling in terms of metaphors. The majority (62%) of the student teachers alluded to the fact that they saw themselves as having to perform more than one role in the teaching profession. One student teacher explicitly imported the concept of 'Multiple Roles' which comprised the following:

- I will have to be their mother, psychologist, friend, brain stimulator – all in one.
- You are six things in one. Now you're a teacher for the one, then an emotional advisor for the other and a spiritual advisor for the other one and it's just how to handle all of the roles to be most effective ... You are their everything...

In this passage the choice of the word 'role' describes the perceptions of teaching to connote responsibility, emphasising the holistic nature of the work of an educator (Rogan & De Kock, 2005, p. 629).

The second most popular theme that emerged was that of a Content Expert who has to transmit a body of subject knowledge. Seventeen student teachers (50%) had this particular role perception. Student teachers would typically comment that 'I have to prepare them for university'. One student teacher actually used the metaphor of a 'walking textbook' and mentioned that he was afraid of embarrassment if a learner would ask him something that he could not answer.

Forty-seven per cent (16) of the students conveyed ideas of nurturing and caring for the learners for whom they would be responsible as teachers. Of all the themes this particular theme was richly elaborated upon by student teachers who chose to talk about the reason for having to care as a professional role. A metaphor used was that of being a 'Mother' to learners. Figure 1 [at the end of the article] is an example of the images that elicited the Mother metaphor. Student teachers typically said 'a school is a safe haven and only place of security for many children from broken families'. The presence of inclusion and the teaching of children with HIV/Aids were strongly presented as reasons for the role of caring. The fact that many children would be orphans, due to parents dying of HIV/Aids, was another reason for referring to the mother metaphor. A metaphor that was used by three of the student teachers to convey their caring

function was that of a 'gardener'. One student teacher said that teaching is like working with a rose bush and then she pointed to a caption on one of the collage pictures that read: 'over the years this rose-filled garden has become a gentle but consuming passion' (see Figure 1). The gardening metaphor used by prospective teachers in this study resonates with findings from a study on practising teachers' thinking about their profession (Arnon, Shani, & Zeigner, 1999) in which of 253 participants, almost two-thirds chose the image of a gardener as closest to their view of a teacher.

Thirty-eight per cent (13) of student teachers signalled that they had to be Facilitators of Learning. Although the term 'Facilitator' was used by student teachers their description of teaching practices was aligned with the transmission paradigm of whole-class direct instruction and talk-and-chalk teaching strategies. The same number of student teachers (38%) indicated that they have to be Role Models to their students. One typical comment in this regard was: 'In me they should see what hard work and dedication is all about'.

Twenty-six per cent (nine) of student teachers used the image of being a Friend to their learners. One student teacher underpinned her idea of being a friend to learners to her own school experience: 'She [teacher] was the best hockey coach we had. We could go to her with any problems ... and you could rely on her to treat that information as highly confidential'. Finally, and surprisingly, only one student alluded to the importance of being a Discipliner as a teacher.

Student teachers' role perceptions after completing the teacher education programme

The purpose of the second phase of data generation was to develop an understanding as to whether and to what extent the experience-rich programme had impacted on the initial role perceptions of the student teachers. In this section we will only report on the most dramatic changes as well as the new role perceptions that emerged.

The most popular post-programme role perception was that of a Role Model. Exactly twice the number of student teachers, compared to the initial number, indicated that they would have to act as Role Models. In the portfolio reflection one of the student teachers offered a rationale for this overwhelming role perception:

For reasons out of our control parents are no longer able to nurture the emotional aspects of their children's lives ... Look at the rape, murder, and robbery statistics and how they have risen in the last 20 years, what is more disturbing is the age of the perpetrators seems to be getting younger ... why should the development of the learners' value system and emotional intelligence become one of the roles of the educators? Well if we are not educating learners to deal with life in the real world in which they will have to function as a whole person, then what are we doing?

The role of Disciplinarian or Policeman featured considerably stronger in the post-role perceptions. Where only one student teacher initially highlighted the disciplinarian role, eight more students had this role perception afterwards. One student teacher sounded rather despondent when she remarked:

...either there are far too many pupils in classes or today's children are very different from what I expected, but I don't know whether I will have the energy to try to constantly waste time on getting kids to behave.

Another student teacher said that she hoped that discipline would become easier

once I am a full time teacher who can work on relationships with students. If not, I don't want to be a policeman and fight and nag to get work done.

The role of Knowledge Provider moved down on the ranked list of most to least frequently occurring roles, one possible reason being that:

I have learnt, and I agree, that pupils have to construct their own meaning. They will do that, I hope, when I create a productive learning environment with fascinating problems, where they can explore while I am guiding them towards the curriculum outcomes.

This remark encapsulates some of the grounding principles of learning facilitation that the student teachers were exposed to during the university-based curriculum. One of the student teachers mentioned that all the information a learner might possibly need is available at 'the touch of a button'. This student teacher concluded that his role would be 'to teach learners how to access and evaluate the quality of all the available info' and not to lecture the subject content. Therefore, he said that his role has changed from that of 'sage on the stage to guide on the side'. Three of the student teachers viewed the Facilitators role in terms of new kinds of relationships with their learners. One student teacher, for example, said that as a Facilitator she is a 'co-learner in any learning situation that believes in maximum interaction amongst learners themselves'. Five of the student teachers qualified the role of Facilitators in terms of the 'learner-centred' pedagogical concept. When probed what learner-centredness meant to them, they had volunteered different interpretations. One interpretation was that of planning for diversity in terms of multiple intelligences: 'Although I didn't really see [mentor teacher's name] being flexible in her teaching, to me it meant giving different types of tasks that can develop all the different types of intelligences'. One prospective science teacher interpreted learner-centredness as allowing learners to engage in more hands-on activities and not to merely do the cook-book types of practical work.

Role perceptions that were not present in the initial role perceptions of any of the student teachers were those of Assessor, Administrator, Brainteaser/Challenger

and 'Edutainer'. In the outcomes-based curriculum that has been introduced in South Africa, formative and summative assessment practices make up a lot of teachers' daily teaching activities. From the responses of the student teachers it was evident that they had become more aware, if not overwhelmed, by the pen-pushing and back-breaking labour of assessment and administration. It was not surprising that more than a third of the student teachers highlighted the new role of a Brainteaser after the programme. One of the philosophical strands that underpins the entire academic university-based curriculum strongly emphasises the fact that real-life problems with intrinsic motivational characteristics should be designed as learning tasks (lessons) that can initiate and sustain the learning process. Finally, the role of Edutainer emerged as a way of describing the use of information communication technologies in interesting ways in order to create 'magic' to engage the 'digital, on-line' generation of learners meaningfully in their own learning.

Discussion

In this article we argue that when people make decisions about their career choices, it is reasonable to assume that they have expectations and some idea of the roles and responsibilities that they see themselves fulfilling in their chosen career. Illustrated by this research we showed that a collection of prospective teachers entered the teacher education programme with rather sophisticated images about the teaching profession, influenced by belief systems based on personal life experiences, prior educational experiences, and visions of an interpreted social reality and learner needs. We also thought it reasonable to assume that the tapestry of experiences they encountered during the course of the programme could be powerful determinants in the process of forging new teacher images (Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, & Kron, 2003).

The initial perceptions of teacher roles identified by the student teachers exposed their underpinning belief systems. This information provided baseline data for a process of making sense of the respective influences of the university-based curriculum and the school-based experiences offering us a deeper understanding of the expectations of prospective teachers. The visual collage strategy used involved an emotional-cognitive reflective and creative process on the part of the student teachers. However, being accustomed to the content orientation of their school and university education the student teachers experienced ambivalence and intense internal conflict when having to reflect on their personal experiences and their perceptions of teacher roles. It was clear from their reactions that they were perplexed by what was expected of them. The actual creation of the collages was not easy for a few students who declared that they were not 'gifted in the field of arts'. It was important to create a climate of mutual trust, confidentiality, encouragement and co-operation to ensure that the strategy rendered a worthwhile experience and reliable data.

Prior to participation in the teacher education programme, the five most popular role perceptions were: Multiple Roles, Knowledge Provider, Mother (carer/nurturer), Facilitator of Learning and Role Model. Generally it appears that the initial pre-programme role perceptions may be categorised into three broad functional domains, namely *psychological*, *instructional* and *philosophical*. The *psychological orientation* has a humanistic approach of me, the 'nice' person, teaching and motivating learners. Roles with a strong psychological orientation were the Mother and Friend roles. The *instructional orientation* focused on the idealistic roles of me, the expert in knowledge, with skills to provide and knowledge to impart to eager learners. The role of Knowledge Provider was an exact manifestation of the instructional orientation to teaching. The *philosophical orientation* tends towards the idealistic and often euphoric mental model and belief system as a point of departure for prospective teachers. Initial role perceptions that resonated with this orientation were those of the Role Model and a variety of nuances captured in the images of Multiple Roles.

After completing the PGCE programme, the role perceptions metamorphosed in a variety of ways. Firstly, the sequence of the five most popular role perceptions were: Role Model, Multiple Roles, Facilitator of Learning, Mother and Knowledge Provider. Secondly, the role of Knowledge Provider was re-conceptualised in the most profound way. The prospective teachers stretched the boundaries of the traditional understanding of their instructional role, based on a transmission mental model, to that of a Facilitator of Learning, aligned with a transformational mental model serving post-modern thinking as presented in the university-based curriculum. Thirdly, four new roles emerged (Edutainer, Brainteaser/Challenger, Assessor and Administrator). The roles of Brainteaser/Challenger and Edutainer complement the role of Learning Facilitator and fit into the instructional orientation category. All these roles are underpinned by teacher functions such as challenging, encouraging and supporting learners to access, evaluate and generate knowledge from both internal and external resources.

We expected the role of Policeman/Disciplinarian to have featured considerably higher on the list of post-role priorities since discipline is a major problem in most schools:

I never thought of myself as a yelling kind of person but I was proved to be wrong, because today I did not only yell at them but was prepared to physically throw children through the window. It is said that children cause disciplinary problems because they are bored, but what do you do if they don't even want to look at the given work to find out whether they are interested or not.

In discussing our research question of 'What contribution does the one-year school-based teacher education programme make to the student teachers' identification of teacher role perceptions?', it can be argued that the shift in role perceptions and the emergence of new roles relate to both the school- and university-based curricula. The research evidence suggests that the analytical-

managerial roles (e.g. Policeman, Administrator) were cultivated through the school-based experience, while the more intuitive-imaginative roles (e.g. Brainteaser, Learning Facilitator) emerged due to the university-based curriculum. Although the student teachers found little evidence of the Facilitator of Learning image in prevailing classroom teaching, it seems to have been internalised by them as a result of the university curriculum component that focuses on reflection, action research, and integrating practice and theory. In support of the process of the construction of a practice-theory, student teachers were constantly exposed to meta-learning through a continuous writing of reflections-on-action. To fill the hiatus in the face of the student teachers' observation of the challenging social, moral and personal problems of learners in schools, as well as the multi-tasking of teachers, the role perceptions of Mother, Role Model and Multiple roles also gained prominence due to exposure to the authentic school context.

It can be concluded that the university-based curriculum in this case study assisted student teachers in negotiating a mindset in support of becoming an agent of change. The prior and post differences in role perception can possibly be accredited to subjecting the pre-service student teachers to continuous reflection on a number of 'living through new experiences'. Sharing their experiences in group discussions afforded the teacher educators an opportunity to influence and establish teacher role perceptions relevant to a different vision of education and confronting them with the complex and demanding roles expected of the professional teacher working in the twenty-first century. Whether these teachers will in fact become advocates for educational change in their classrooms once they are entrenched in a school environment where a promising policy and new professional images of teachers are belittled and ridiculed remains to be uncovered by further research.

Finally, the outcome of this research cannot be described as dramatic but the results do show a tendency towards confirming existing conjectures on the influence that the innovative PGCE programme has on pre-service teachers and their teacher role perceptions.

Conclusions and implications

This article documents research on student teachers' initial perceptions of the roles that they see themselves performing and on understanding how the student teachers, after completion of the PGCE programme, subsequently (re)arranged their perceptions of teacher roles. In this research the teacher education programme intentionally turned away from a traditional theory-driven and mainly university-based programme design to an authentic experiential programme, challenging student teachers to make sense of their experiences. The results of this research assist us in determining whether the programme challenged or reaffirmed the roles and the underpinning beliefs that the prospective professionals brought to the programme. This research resonates with some of

the existing research in endorsing the importance of spending significant time on a productive inward journey in the developmental process of a professional identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004, p. 120). Together with Samuel (2003, p. 307) we believe that once student teachers are able to identify and reveal the forces that impact on and drive their actions and reactions, they are able 'to critique them, to alter them and to modify their influence over them'.

It would be fascinating to pursue a longitudinal study in which the same group of student teachers could, after a year's teaching, be interviewed and observed to see how the initial and post-programme role perceptions have (or have not) evolved after the challenges they have by then faced. We also need to inquire how prospective African educators, of whom many had personal and school experiences of 'liberation before education' negotiate and shape their role perceptions through the teacher education programme. To be able to do this important exercise, the democratic procedures now in place have to be successful in mobilising greater numbers of African students to take up teaching as a profession in South Africa.

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Figure 1. Student teacher's collage