



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
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# **How student teachers construct and use phronesis to enhance their professional development**

by

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## Declaration of authorship

I declare that this submission is my own work and that it has been written in my own words. All citations from published or unpublished works have been acknowledged in text and referenced in full.

Signature of student: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

In the present context of South African education many learners may be denied access to the modern world, and from developing as empowered individuals for a world of uncertainty, due to inadequate schooling. The learners' poor results in national and international studies and dysfunctional schools, for example, are clear evidence of inadequate schooling. If we are to improve schooling, and hence, the quality of teaching and learning in South African schools, we need to address the quality of teacher education that student teachers receive as part of their professional development. These improvements in schooling will depend on how student teachers are professionally developed, not to teach, but to facilitate learning. It is on this basis that I explore how student teachers construct and use phronesis to enhance their professional development. Within this question I explore the student teachers' baseline phronesis when they enter the programme and how the student teachers utilise the contribution of the mentor teacher and the specialisation programme to construct and use phronesis to enhance their professional development.

An interpretive, mixed methods, case study participatory action research methodology was used to explore these research questions. The participants in this study were three Postgraduate Certificate in Education Life Sciences student teachers, the specialisation lecturer, mentor teacher and the researcher. The context of this study was in the setting of a radical, innovative teacher education programme at the University of Pretoria, which focused strongly on the construction and use of phronesis. A variety of data collection

instruments, including visual data, personal profile questionnaires and document analysis were used to collect the data. Ethical and research rigour issues were attended to and implemented.

The findings are presented in four case study participatory action research cycles, each having a particular context and purpose. The descriptive data from each of these cycles was analysed to develop responses for the research questions. The finding in response to research question one indicated that the student teachers' beliefs, emotions, desire and vision for the type of facilitator that they wanted to be influenced their perception of a facilitator of learning. Furthermore, their awareness of the challenges and constraints that 'teachers' experienced when teaching in particular contexts did not deter them from becoming facilitators of learning. The mentor teachers' contributions were: direct with regard to providing support in designing learning tasks, resources and assessment feedback. Indirect contributions were in terms of the student teachers developing the need to generate ideas for effective practice and to change their beliefs about the role of a facilitator of learning, and the impact of this role on the learners' work ethic and relationships. The contributions of the specialisation programme were in terms of challenging and changing student teachers' beliefs about the role of a facilitator of learning and the development of learning practice in authentic contexts.

The student teachers constructed and used their phronesis to enhance their professional development. Incorporated in each student teacher's practice theory are their personal and professional transformations on their journey to becoming facilitators of learning.

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## COMMENTS: Researcher reflections on completing the thesis

This has been the most challenging, exciting, stimulating and frustrating, depressing experience that I have had over the past few years. At times I questioned why I even bothered to carry on with this research. It was at these times that my inner strength and the excitement of the findings that motivated me further. My family and colleagues also played a major role in motivating me to the point of completion. I cannot deny the enormous impact that my supervisor played on the development and final completion of this research project. During the period I just thought - How the heck did I land up with him? He barely gives advice - a few comments at the top of a chapter ... My big question was - what are these all the comments that he can give?

His statement - This is your research; **your academic struggle** really broke me. I questioned what he meant by this and why did other supervisors work differently going through the students' pages and writing comments on each page?

### Words to Supervisor

We met for the first time in February 2003. It was a strange but stimulating one - a time when I did not know much about you so I was wary of this white male with an Afrikaans accent and surname and he was from Pretoria.

The beginning steps - developing the proposal was a very uncertain, insecure period ..... you knew what you were doing when you left me to swim in a floundering manner and almost sank at times. Some comments made were harsh and even callous,

something that I could not accept. The topic and research questions were finally developed and then came the other sections ..... the rationale etc ..

Finally the proposal defence date was upon us .. you were confident and so was I .. it went off very well.

The one question asked by a lecturer during the defence was: Do you not think that your supervisor is expecting too much from you .. Is this research too big?

At the time I was so excited about starting the research - I said NO QUITE indignantly.

Then came the data collection - the traveling and documenting which you facilitated and supported extensively. Thank you for this - it was difficult for me to manage with work in Durban and collecting data in Pretoria. Your spirit and energy were good and go, go, go.