

Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of their Preparedness for Teaching

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ABSTRACT A teacher's first exposure to the teaching profession may not always meet his/her expectations of a career in teaching and may come as a bit of a shock. Drawing on the findings of a similar study, the researcher has discovered that if the expectations of pre-service teachers are not met, they sometimes experience frustration and disappointment in the workplace. This study examines how well the University of South Africa prepares its students for the teaching profession. Quantitative research design was used for this study. Final-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) students completed the questionnaire. Principles from the person-environment fit theory, the social cognitive theory and the self-efficacy theory were used to explore some of the factors that may impact on the adjustment of newly qualified teachers to the workplace. All in all, the results indicate that pre-service teachers reported feeling better prepared for their workplace in the following year.

INTRODUCTION

Competent teachers and the skills that they are supposed to possess may be the most important factors contributing to the success of learners (Goddard et al 2004; Bandura 1997; Morrow 2007; Moore 2007). Confidence in one's ability to be a skillful, effective and competent teacher is important, because this confidence generally gives rise to fulfilment of these expectations. Recent enquiry has drawn attention to the significance of self-efficacy as part of the overall process of preparing pre-service teachers and of ensuring success during the early teaching experience (Knobloch 2002).

Self-efficacy refers to "teachers' beliefs about their own capacities as teachers" (Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998:20). Self-efficacy as a concept refers to being able to picture yourself achieving what it is that you wish to achieve at the level that you wish to achieve it. As Bandura (1997) puts it, "self-efficacy refers to people's convictions about their own capabilities for successfully executing a course of action that leads to a desired outcome."

Self-efficacy of pre-service teachers could be the key to determining the success or failure of a teacher or university programme. It, therefore, becomes imperative to carefully consider how teacher-training institutions prepare these future teachers to face the anticipated teaching challenges with confidence.

The research was undertaken for two reasons. First, perceived falling standards of teacher

education in the country (South Africa) has prompted this research. Second, there is concern about the demand and supply in the teaching profession. On the whole, research on how distance learning institutions, in particular the University of South Africa (Unisa), prepare their students for classroom practice is pertinent for improvement of the quality of the teaching force. Unisa is the biggest distance learning institution in South Africa and produces more teachers than the other 22 universities in the country. It is against this backdrop that this paper explores the training to classroom transition of the pre-service teachers of the University of South Africa. Final year teachers enrolled for the Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree, specialising in secondary-school teaching, were targeted. The research questions centred on how pre-service teachers rate their commitment to teaching, self-perceptions of their teaching self-efficacy, preparedness for teaching, competency levels and, finally, their expectations of workload in the workplace. For the purpose of this discussion, "pre-service teachers" is the collective term used to describe teachers who are not yet in service and who are currently enrolled for one of the teacher-training programmes offered by institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

The researcher begins by presenting a literature review on a brief overview of the university teacher-training programmes in South Africa and theories under-pinning the study. This is followed by the section on methodology. In the

final section, the researcher discusses the findings and the implications of the findings as well as the issues for future research

University Teacher-Training Programmes in South Africa

Two popular teacher-training programmes in South Africa are the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (a teaching qualification obtained after a first degree) and the Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree (an integrated four-year course in initial teacher education). More specifically, in terms of this study, the BEd degree course at Unisa consists of three phases, namely the Foundation Phase, the Intermediate and Senior Phase, and the Senior and Further Education and Training Phase. This kind of structure encompasses all phases of schooling in South Africa. The South African education system consists of four phases of schooling, namely the Foundation Phase, which includes the Reception year and Grades 1, 2 and 3; the Intermediate Phase, which includes Grades 4, 5 and 6; the Senior Phase, which is made up of Grades 7, 8 and 9; and the Further Education and Training Phase, which covers Grades 10, 11 and 12 (National Curriculum Statement 2002).

Students may either enrol for the four-year BEd programme, specialising in a particular phase, or combine two of the phases. For example, those who prefer teaching younger children would enrol for a BEd Foundation Phase (Grades R–3), while those who prefer teaching older children would enrol for a BEd Intermediate and Senior Phase (Grades 4–9) or a BEd Senior and Further Education and Training Phase (Grades 10–12) respectively.

In South Africa, for example, both teacher recruitment and retention present tremendous challenges. It was projected that by 2010 there would be a shortfall of around 18 000 teachers in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2007; Chisholm 2009). There seem to be three problems that contribute to the shortage of teachers in South Africa: (1) a proportion of students who enrol for teaching programmes at various universities in South Africa do not complete their studies; (2) those who do complete their studies do not join the teaching profession; and (3) those who do join the teaching profession do not stay in the profession for very long (Diko and Letseka 2009; Chisholm 2009). In a bid to prevent this

problem from escalating, the South African Department of Education made available resources in the form of bursaries (the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme) for high-school learners who have completed Grade 12 and who wish to pursue a full teaching qualification in areas of priority. Areas of priority include technology, science and mathematics. The bursary programme covers full tuition and accommodation costs for qualifying students.

“Reality Shock” and “Burnout”

The transition from university to the teaching environment often gives rise to disappointment or “reality shock” (Veenman 1984:144). Veenman defines “reality shock” as “the assimilation of a complex reality which forces itself incessantly on the beginning teacher, day in day out.” According to Veenman, there are five indicators of the existence of reality shock, namely perception of problems, changes in behaviour, changes in attitudes, changes in personality, and leaving the profession.

The same concept was addressed in Huberman’s work on the stages of teachers’ careers. In describing teachers’ professional life cycles, Huberman (1989) identified reality shock as a key characteristic of the first year of teaching – a year he referred to as one of both “survival” and “discovery”. Huberman’s conceptualisation of the first year of teaching suggested that successful adaptation to the reality shock of the new teaching situation presaged a focus on “discovery”, while less successful adaptation foreshadowed a perception of the teaching experience as one of “survival”, or even of early withdrawal from the profession.

A decade later, Friedman (2000) identified reality shock as giving rise to “burnout”. The term “burnout” refers to physical, emotional and mental exhaustion (Friedman 2000). Research has shown teacher burnout to be higher during the beginning of the teaching career (Cherniss 1980; Jarvis 2002; Weisberg and Sagie 1999). Burnout is caused by, among other things, inadequate initial teacher training and a lack of initial motivation (Maslach and Leiter 1997). Burned-out teachers are more frequently absent or late for work; they become noticeably less idealistic and more rigid; their performance at work shows marked deterioration; and they fantasize about, or actually plan on, leaving the profession (Mackenzie Davey and Arnold 2000).

Recent research by Goddard and O'Brien (2003) on the emotional wellbeing of teaching graduates as they enter the workforce indicates that those individuals were developing alarmingly high levels of burnout during their first year of teaching. Clearly, then, this area is particularly worthy of attention, with significant implications for both the individuals and the organisation. However, given the demands of the teaching profession, cases of reality shock and burnout are numerous, and are related to both the individual and the organisation.

While a detailed examination of all likely causes of burnout is clearly beyond the scope of this study, principles from the person-environment fit theory, the social cognitive theory and the self-efficacy theory were used to explore some of the factors that may impact on the adjustment of newly qualified teachers to the workplace. These theories are discussed in the next section.

Person-Environment Fit Theory

Principles of the person-environment fit theory have been presented as being particularly useful in examining students' transition process from university to the workplace (Swanson and Fouad 1999). This theory places emphasis on the needs of both the individual and the organisation. In this way it is as important for the individual to be satisfied with the organisation as it is for the organisation to be satisfied with the individual. High levels of satisfaction for both parties are indicative of a good "fit" between the individual and the organisation and are thought to result in good performance outcomes, high job satisfaction, job stability, retention and tenure.

According to Edwards et al. (1998), there are several distinctions relative to "fit". The first distinction is between the individual and the environment, the second is between the objective representation and the subjective representation, and the third is between demands and abilities. "Misfit between demands and abilities induces coping and defense mechanisms, which in turn influences objective and subjective environments" (Brewer and McMahan-Landers 2003:37).

According to Brewer and McMahan-Landers (2003:126), "stress can occur if there is a mismatch between the reality of the work envi-

ronment (objective) and an individual's perceptions of the work environment (subjective)." This stress may result in an individual leaving the organisation. Stated differently, should the needs of either party (individual or organisation) fail to be met, the system will be compelled to change, which can result in an individual exiting the organisation. As such, it is argued that a smooth transition to the workplace is the result of a match between the individual's skills and abilities and the organisation's needs, as well as a match between the individual's needs and the organisation's rewards. Therefore, this study focuses on describing persons in terms of how prepared they perceive themselves to be at the end of their university training.

A number of other variables are considered to be important in understanding how well teachers adjust to the transition to the first year of teaching. These variables are, among others, their perceived adequacy of skills and abilities, expectations of the workplace, teaching self-efficacy and attribution style (Mackenzie Davey and Arnold 2000). The researcher discusses these variables in the next section.

The Perceived Adequacy of Skills and Abilities

It is evident that an individual enters the workplace with adequate skills and abilities appropriate to the profession and to which universities are expected to make an important contribution. Darling-Hammond (2005) argues that teachers who are well-prepared for teaching practice are more confident and successful when entering the workplace. However, it may come as a surprise that there have been reports in the literature about graduates not meeting the requirements of employers. A recent policy statement from the South African Department of Education (Republic of South Africa 2007) called for better teachers (emphasis added), and in 2006 the education desk of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) identified a number of challenges facing teacher education in Africa more generally, while also expressing concern about quality. Glennie and Mays (2008) argue that often teacher education courses do not sufficiently equip teachers with skills appropriate to meet workplace challenges. Robinson (2003:208) notes a tendency to focus on certification rather than on developing the students. Graham and McKenzie (1995), for instance, dis-

cuss reports that employers do not feel that graduates possess the necessary skills and abilities and argue for more practical work-based experience.

There have been several suggestions in the literature about how to better prepare graduates for the workplace — the most commonly discussed improvement being the introduction of broad workplace experience during university education, as is the case in education courses. Graham and McKenzie (1995) argue that if university education is designed to closely resemble the standards and procedures of work required by the workplace as well as to equip students with the skills and knowledge valued by employers, graduates will not only adjust to the workplace faster and more effectively, but will also begin to contribute to the organisation sooner, and with less workplace training and development. Likewise, according to Bailey (1997), work placements help students to clarify their personal goals, make informed career choices, develop a work ethic and sense of confidence in the workplace, increase their earning potential and consolidate their academic learning through practical application.

Darling-Hammond (2005) and Quick and Siebörger (2005) also argue in favour of university practicum placements and suggest that they help students make the transition from university study to full-time work in several ways. For instance, they give students an opportunity to identify the outcomes of work that they value, as well as the personal attributes, skills and abilities that will elicit those outcomes. As a result, these students are more likely to elicit positive outcomes from their first job, be more satisfied, and therefore be more likely to remain in their jobs. Practicum placements also expose students to the work culture while they are still part of the university culture. This allows them to resolve the differences between these two cultures while still receiving the benefit and support of the familiar university culture (Darling-Hammond 2005; Quick and Siebörger 2005).

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, the apparent benefits of university practicum placements are numerous and well documented. It is ironic then that teachers, as one of the groups of students to arguably receive the most workplace experience during their studies, would also be the group that experiences high levels of burnout during their first

year on the job (Goddard and O'Brien 2003). This study endeavours to understand the experience of teaching by examining important person and environmental factors identifiable near the end of the final pre-service year.

Expectations of the Workplace

Another factor that may contribute to the early experiences of graduates as they move into the workplace is the expectations that they form of the world of work. This is a common theme in the literature on the transition to full-time work, with many suggesting that graduates may have higher expectations than most (Goodwin and O'Connor 2003; Graham and McKenzie 1995; Perrone and Vickers 2003; Taylor 1988). Graduates may form unrealistic expectations of a vast array of factors such as workplace rewards, the degree of difficulty and nature of the work that they will be doing, their likely workload and time pressures, and the social structure or culture of the organisation itself.

One of the research studies that looked at student teachers' expectations of teaching as a career choice in South Africa is that by Mokoena (2009), in which it was found that most participants expected to work in schools with sufficient resources, expected there to be enough time for individual teachers to do their work, expected to be involved in management within a few years, and expected to stay in teaching for no longer than ten years. So, if such expectations played an important part in the student's choice of teaching as a career and those expectations were not realised on the job itself, this may well be critical in explaining why some new teachers leave the profession within the first few years. However, this study focuses on the expectations of pre-service teachers with regard to their skills and the workplace in general. Other theories forming part of this study are social cognitive theory and teaching efficacy, and these are discussed in the next section.

The Social Cognitive Theory and Teaching Efficacy

Other theories that this study was based on were Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. Bandura (1982) suggests that a person's belief in accomplishing a desired outcome is influenced

by a set of personal factors and certain environmental factors. Also, these theories support the idea that belief in one's ability to achieve a certain task (self-efficacy) will result in competent performance of the said task. This study focused on a more specific type of self-efficacy known as teaching efficacy. Tschannen-Moran et al. (2001) suggest that teaching efficacy affects the teacher's ability to accomplish desired outcomes. Teaching efficacy is the teacher's ability to analyse the teaching-related task and to feel competent at accomplishing that task (Tschannen-Moran et al. 2001). Guskey and Passaro (1994) define teaching efficacy as a teacher's belief in being able to affect student learning for all types of students. Teaching efficacy is an important indicator of a teacher's ability to manage a classroom, inspire students, and plan and organise effective lessons. Teaching efficacy indicates the amount of time and effort a teacher will put into meeting students' needs (Tschannen-Moran et al. 2001).

Allinder (1994) discovered that teachers with high teaching self-efficacy put more effort and detail into planning and organisation. Teachers with high teaching efficacy are also motivated and have a tendency to persevere through challenges and undesired results (Goddard et al. 2004). According to Tschannen-Moran et al. (2001: 22), teaching efficacy has a cyclical nature, with either a positive or a negative effect: "Greater efficacy leads to greater effort and persistence, which leads to better performance, which in turn leads to greater efficacy [and] lower efficacy leads to less effort and giving up easily, which leads to poor teaching outcomes, which then produce decreased efficacy."

Thus, it could be argued that an individual with a high sense of teaching efficacy would be more likely to respond to the experience of "reality shock" in an adaptive way (through a shift in strategy, information seeking, etc.), and effectively improve the person-environment fit. For this study, teaching efficacy is defined as the teacher's self-concept of his/her ability to accomplish the desired outcomes of teaching. Pre-service teaching efficacy is the highest during the pre-service years, but decreases during the first year of teaching and with teaching experience (Hebert et al. 1998; Soodak and Podell 1997). Pre-service teachers with higher efficacy are rated higher on teaching behaviours by their supervising teachers (Saklofske et al. 1988).

Tschannen-Moran et al. (2001) suggest that teaching efficacy may be improved by teacher-education programmes giving pre-service teachers more opportunities for actual experiences with instructing and managing children in a variety of contexts with increasing levels of complexity and challenge to provide mastery experiences and specific feedback. According to Tschannen-Moran et al. (2001:24), student teaching gives pre-service teachers a chance to gather information about efficacy. If student teaching is experienced as a sudden, total-immersion, sink-or-swim approach it will probably have a negative impact on teaching efficacy. As such it would seem vitally important that student teachers develop a realistic sense of their likely effectiveness in the classroom and that this efficacy be as high as possible.

The next section discusses the methodological design of this study.

METHODOLOGY

This section briefly discusses the context of the study, the characteristics of the participants and the derivation of the measurement instruments used.

The Context of the Study

The research was conducted at Unisa, and more specifically in the Department of Teacher Education, one of the biggest departments at Unisa. Unisa was selected for the following reasons: firstly it has a large student population compared with other universities in South Africa, and secondly it was easier for the researcher and author of this article to conduct this study as he is a lecturer at Unisa in the Department of Teacher Education.

The Participants

The research study targeted 102 undergraduate distance-education students enrolled for the module in teaching methods (subject didactics) of life sciences for a BEd degree, specialising in secondary-school teaching. The life sciences module was selected because it is one of the priority learning areas for the South African Department of Education.

The Data Collection Instrument

The study was designed as descriptive, involving quantitative data collection and analysis. A questionnaire was used for data collection. One hundred and two (102) questionnaires, together with reply envelopes, were posted to the students. Participants were informed of the study in advance, via email and SMS. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was designed to elicit socio-demographic data from the students and contained closed questions (multiple-choice or yes/no questions). The second part of the questionnaire was designed to elicit data following the aim of the study and guiding research questions. The questions in this part of the questionnaire were also closed questions, but students had to choose their answers from a seven-point Likert scale. Of the 102 questionnaires issued, 78 were returned. Therefore, the findings of this study are based on the responses of 78 participants.

The Design of the Questionnaire Used for Data Collection

Commitment to Teaching

On the five-point Likert scale rating from 1 = high to 5 = low, participants were asked to indicate how committed they feel about choosing career in teaching. Furthermore the participants were also asked to comment on their choice.

The Teaching Self-efficacy Scale

Relevant literature was used for formulating the questionnaire (Tschannen-Moran et al. 2001; Bandura 1997). The teaching self-efficacy scale consists of 12 items describing various tasks particular to the classroom situation. Participants were asked to rate to what extent they felt they could perform each task competently on a seven-point Likert scale. Questions included, "To what extent can you apply various teaching strategies in the classroom?"; "How much can you do to get students to work together in the classroom?" and "How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?" Participant ratings were averaged to calculate the total teaching self-efficacy score.

Teachers' Self-reported Preparedness to Teaching

This was measured by asking participants to rate on a seven-point Likert scale the extent to which university education had prepared them to face various challenges associated with the teaching role. The seven challenges were taken from the literature (Jacobs et al. 2007; Cowley 2003) and also from the discussion that the researcher had with pre-service teachers and their mentors during his visits to schools. The BEd programme is structured in such a way that students are expected to do both the theory and the practicals in schools. Items included "Dealing with disruptive behaviour in the classroom"; "Getting parents to become involved in the education of their children"; "Getting instructional resources needed for teaching and learning"; "Write a lesson with achievable outcomes" and "Build relationships with colleagues". The participants were asked to rate on a seven-point Likert scale how important they believe it is that university prepares teachers for each of these challenges.

Self-reported Competency Levels

Each of the seven roles or teacher competencies as outlined in The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (Republic of South Africa 2007) was listed, and participants were asked to rate on a seven-point Likert scale how well prepared they felt in terms of each of the competencies. Items included "Create learning environments that are safe and supportive for learners", and "Assess and report on student learning and progress."

The Expected Workload in the Workplace

An open-ended question was used to assess the expected workload of first-year teachers. Participants were asked to indicate how many hours per week they expected to work in the field the following year, including such activities as marking learners' work, preparing for lessons and doing administrative work.

FINDINGS

Biographical Information

Participants provided biographical information – age, gender and ethnicity, and the phase

and the sector they would prefer to teach the following year. Table 1 indicates that the majority (78%) were aged below 30 years, thus being able to offer several future years to the teaching profession. The gender balance was expectedly uneven with 68% being female participants and 32% being male participants. This situation confirms the notion that men do not wish to enter the teaching profession.

Commitment to Teaching

Participants were asked to rate their commitment to teaching given the shortage of teaching in the country. Table 1 indicates that 72% of the student teachers perceived teaching as the right career for them. A relatively small percentage considered other careers. Given the high percentage of responses, one might argue that the majority of participants had an understanding of the demand for teachers in South African schools and were confident of obtaining a teaching post on completion of their course. However, the author noted that commitment was understood differently by the participants. Some perceived commitment in terms of their own personal attributes such as sharing learning experiences and an enjoyable career path. Others understood commitment to be derived from the perceived benefits of the nature of teaching. For example, participants indicated that teaching would be a challenging profession, interesting, very enjoyable and a rewarding career. Others indicated that they wish to pursue a career they would enjoy regardless of the salary.

Table 1: Personal details and other information

Age	20 – 30 years 30 – 40 years Over 50 years
Gender	Male Female
What Phase of Schooling Would You Join?	Early childhood Primary school Secondary school
Please circle as appropriate according to the following rating, where	1 = High 5 = Low
Please indicate how committed you are to choosing a career in teaching	1 2 3 4 5
Comment:	

Competency Levels

A factor analysis was performed on the seven roles and their associated competencies outlined

by the South African Department of Education (in terms of the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996). Two factors associated with teaching and learning were identified.

Competencies loading on the first factor related to preparation and lesson design, as well as encouraging student learning. Items included “Select and prepare suitable textual and visual resources for learning” and “Construct learning environments that are appropriately contextualised and inspirational”. On average, students rated themselves as moderately well prepared for delivering on competencies related to preparation and lesson design and encouraging student learning ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 0.74$). Competencies loading on the second factor related solely to teaching activities outside the classroom. Items included “Practise and promote a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others” and “Develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organisations”. On average, students rated themselves as sufficiently prepared for teaching responsibilities outside the classroom ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.04$). Further analysis of the data through comparing the means by using repeated-measurements MANOVA via SPSS indicated that students rated themselves as significantly less prepared for activities outside the classroom than for activities related to preparing and designing lessons and encouraging student learning activities ($t(78) = 5.66$, $p < .001$).

No factor analysis was performed for the seven challenges identified through the reading of literature (Jacobs et al. 2007; Cowley 2003) and through the author of this article's discussions with various pre-service teachers while visiting the teachers doing their teaching practice in schools. The above was done to compare students' ratings of preparedness for each of the challenges and students' ratings of the importance of being prepared for the challenges identified. Means for both the adequacy of preparedness and the importance of preparedness for each of the challenges are presented in Table 2. Means for both adequacy and importance ratings were compared by using a repeated-measurements MANOVA. As can be seen from Table 2, on average pre-service teachers felt most prepared for writing a lesson plan with achievable learning outcomes ($M = 6.32$, $SD = 0.96$), followed by dealing with disruptive behaviour in

Table 2: Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for pre-service teachers' self-reported preparedness for the challenges of teaching and the importance of that preparedness (N = 78)

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Adequacy of preparedness</i>		<i>Importance of preparedness</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Writing a lesson plan with achievable learning outcomes	6.32	0.96	5.67	1.45
Dealing with disruptive behaviour in the classroom	5.73	0.99	6.52	0.96
Assisting learners with special educational needs	4.48	1.32	6.64	0.90
Managing big classes	4.94	1.31	6.80	0.77
Improvising where resources are lacking	5.14	1.15	6.62	0.82
Building strong relationships with the parents	3.95	1.41	6.40	1.05
Building relationships with colleagues at the workplace	4.42	1.42	6.28	1.01

the classroom ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 0.99$) and improvising where classroom resources are lacking ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.15$). Pre-service teachers felt least prepared for managing large classes ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.30$) followed by assisting learners with special educational needs ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.32$) and building relationships with colleagues at the workplace ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.42$) and with parents ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.41$).

On the other hand, on average pre-service teachers felt that managing big classes ($M = 6.80$, $SD = 0.78$) as well as assisting learners with special educational needs ($M = 6.64$, $SD = 0.90$) were the most important, followed by improvising where classroom resources are lacking ($M = 6.62$, $SD = 0.82$) and dealing with disruptive behaviour in the classroom ($M = 6.52$, $SD = 0.96$). Pre-service teachers rated being well prepared for writing a lesson with achievable learning outcomes plan as least important ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 1.45$), followed by building relationships with colleagues ($M = 6.28$, $SD = 1.01$) and building relationships with parents ($M = 6.40$, $SD = 1.05$).

Teaching Self-efficacy

A factor analysis was also conducted for the teaching self-efficacy scale. This factor analysis revealed a factor relating to behaviour management in the classroom. Items from the behaviour-management factor included "How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?" and "How much can you do to get children to adhere to classroom rules?" On average, students rated themselves as being able to do "Quite a bit" to manage classroom behaviour ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 0.74$), indicating moderately high levels of efficacy for behaviour management.

The Expected Workload in the Workplace

Finally, the number of hours per week that the pre-service teachers expected to work the following year was examined. On average, the pre-service teachers expected to work 45.3 hours per week. Interestingly enough, the number of hours corresponds with the information contained in the South African Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997. Clearly this indicates that pre-service teachers are fully informed about their rights in the workplace.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

There are several points worthy of discussion concerning pre-service teachers' perceptions of their preparedness for teaching. Evidence from this small scale study shows that for these pre-service teachers, commitment to teaching was very high. This is significant given the average age of this cohort of teachers. The participants were still very young and it might have been expected that such participants would have responded differently. However, the author noted that commitment to teaching was interpreted differently by the participants in this study and this might have implications in the long run. The long term implications for schools and the South African Department of education of this is that, as long as teachers stay in teaching for only a few years, the profession will undoubtedly be clouded by young teachers who lack the experience needed to take on senior roles where effective leadership and management require longer service.

This study also highlighted the value of examining person and environment factors as applied to pre-service teachers in the final year of study. The pre-service teachers reported reason-

ably high levels of confidence in their preparedness for the workplace the following year. It is suggested that teachers may find the classroom a more difficult environment than anticipated. Interestingly enough, teachers reported feeling better prepared for the competencies relating to classroom activities than for the other more general tasks of teaching. While this may not come as a surprise, it could have significant implications for their experiences the following year. It could also be argued that exposure to the school culture during their practicum placements would have been expected to prepare teachers for the more general aspects of their role, such as developing relationships with staff.

However, the practicum experience can be very focused on the specific activities of the classroom, with little exposure to the broader culture of the school, which may be a reflection of how students and supervising teachers and university staff perceive their roles.

Such concerns then appear to be duplicated in the pre-service teachers' ratings of their abilities to face the various, often broader, challenges of teaching. Pre-service teachers, for instance, reported feeling least prepared for building relationships with parents and colleagues. Also, they reported feeling best prepared for writing a lesson plan, but then reported that preparedness is least important. Interestingly enough, these teachers also rate being able to build relationships with colleagues as less important. This may also have significant implications for their adjustment and wellbeing the following year. Clearly, the ability to develop positive relationships with the people around them is vitally important to any newcomers, and first-year teachers in particular would be expected to benefit from the social support inherent in these relationships (Mackenzie Davey and Arnold 2000).

Pre-service teachers also reported moderately high levels of expected teaching efficacy. These findings are consistent with Roberts et al. (2006), in which overall teaching efficacy increased from the beginning to the end of the student teaching experience. Based on the results of this study, the teacher education programmes at Unisa and the respective experiences of the pre-service teachers during their final year of the teacher education programmes have had a positive impact on teaching efficacy. In fact, this study shows that the teaching efficacy of the pre-service teachers has been developed to a point where pre-service teachers felt

that they have "Quite a bit" of skill in handling behaviour management.

Pre-service teachers expected a reasonable workload the following year. This is reassuring and probably a realistic expectation of the time involved. In case the situation changes, this would appear as a "reality shock" to the teachers.

CONCLUSION

The research presented in this article was a small-scale study with data collected in one case. The study highlighted the value of examining pre-service teachers using the principles of person fit theory, social cognitive theory and the self-efficacy theory. Although the pre-service teachers reported feeling better prepared for their teaching role the following year, it is suggested that they may find the workplace more difficult than they had anticipated. In conclusion, the researchers argue that if university education is designed to closely resemble the standards and procedures of work required by the workplace as well as to equip students with the skills and knowledge valued by employers, graduates will not only adjust to the workplace faster and more effectively, but will also begin to contribute to the organisation sooner, and with less workplace training and development. Likewise, practicum placements should be structured in such a way that students are exposed to the broader school culture while they are still part of the university culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further research should attempt to determine the exact factors in the teacher education programmes that assist teaching efficacy development. The information could be imperative to improving and sustaining teaching efficacy in the early years of teaching, thus addressing the growing teacher shortage in the country (South Africa).

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