STUDENT TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEACHER AS CARER

S. van Putten, L. Beukes, H. Botha

University of Pretoria (SOUTH AFRICA)

Abstract

Whereas engineers, doctors and lawyers, for example, have clearly described and delineated professional identities, the professional identity of the teacher has been rather nebulous, particularly in terms of what constitutes that identity. Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) suggested that this identity can be described in terms of three aspects: the teacher as carer, subject expert and teaching and learning expert. It is the first of these which is addressed in this paper. The teacher as carer must hold the qualities of caring generally described as pastoral and should therefore be kind and sympathetic, motivating, patient, respectful, understanding, non-discriminatory, firm and approachable, while teaching in such a way that meaningful learning takes place in an environment where his/her expertise as a subject specialist is undoubted. Students studying to be teachers have construed what it means to be a teacher – who they are in the profession. However, this conception of their Professional Teacher Identity (PTI) may undergo change as the individual is involved in teaching practica. In a project involving final year teaching students, an intervention was introduced in which they were asked to reflect both metacognitively and corporately on the idea of the teacher as carer. This reflection allowed the project to play both a revelatory and developmental role in the construction of the individual's PTI. This paper reports on the first phase of this project, in which Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA) was used as the strategy for collecting data. The following question was developed in order to structure the data that was gathered: How do student teachers perceive the role of the teacher as carer as part of PTI? The participants indicated that caring is a vital part of any teacher's practice and that without it, PTI is unbalanced. They were convinced that the most effective teaching and learning could only take place if the teacher is a subject expert with a sound knowledge of how to teach that subject, while at the same time the learners are comfortable in the certainty that the teacher also cares for them.

Keywords: Professional Teacher Identity, Carer, Teaching Practice.