

Chapter #15

STUDENT TEACHERS BEHAVING BADLY: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS' MISBEHAVIOUR DURING TEACHING PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Teaching Practice (TP) is a crucial component in initial teacher training programmes. All B. Ed and PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) students at South African universities must undertake TP and behave professionally and ethically during their TP period. However, universities often receive negative feedback from the *teaching community* about the behaviour of some students. This negative feedback was one of the motivating factors that prompted this study. The second motivation was the findings of the portfolio content that student teachers have to submit after TP. Some students' actions were dishonest, for example, they forged *mentor teachers'* signatures. The purpose of this study was to obtain teachers' perceptions of how pre-service teachers conduct themselves during TP. Interviews were conducted with thirty participants to collect data. The findings revealed that even though many students are generally well-behaved and ethical, some of them are entitled, unprofessional and disrespectful. From these findings one can conclude that some student teachers behave in an undesirable fashion which can negatively impact their future placements at schools. One of the recommendations is for student teachers to be adequately prepared by teacher education programmes to meet the professional requirements of teaching in the real school and classroom environment.

Keywords: teaching practice, student teachers, unprofessional, immoral, behaviour, values.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice is a critical aspect of initial teacher education training that prepares student teachers (also referred to as pre-service teachers) to become professional, skilled, ethical and competent teachers after completing their studies (Merc, 2004; Roy, Wieser, Dhlamini, & Thomas, 2016). During TP student teachers are afforded the opportunity to gain practical experience in the actual teaching and learning environment, namely the school. In addition, student teachers are afforded the opportunity to explore the different educational contexts in which teaching and learning take place.

Marais and Meier (2004: p. 221) assert that “the term TP represents the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools”. It is a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when students work in the relevant industries to receive specific in-service training in order to apply theory to practice. Ehrich, Kimber, Millwater, and Cranston (2011) assert that teaching is profoundly a moral activity and that teachers, whether they are in-service or pre-service, are expected to conduct themselves in moral ways. Values thus play a crucial role in pre-service teachers' path to becoming teachers. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is the body that determines the duration of TP. Policy documents related to TP

stipulate that B. Ed students must spend twenty weeks at the schools. Students who are registered for the PGCE must spend ten weeks at the schools. This duration is spread over four years and during these times student teachers are at all times supposed to adhere to the policies and codes of conduct of schools (Republic of South Africa, n.d; Republic of South Africa, 2011).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The process of becoming a teacher is for many students a complex and challenging phenomenon. It is also the subject of multiple interests and ways of exploring its different dimensions, role-players and dynamics (Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2012). One of the dynamics of becoming a teacher is that all prospective teachers have to undergo TP as part of their training. After completing their TP the student teachers are required to submit portfolios, which contain evidence of what they did at the schools (Taole & Van Wyk, 2015). The content of the portfolios is among others, attendance registers, mentor teacher feedback forms and lesson presentation forms. Most of these forms are signed (or should be signed) by mentor teachers. However, as was witnessed in the portfolios, some students forge signatures, while some fill in information themselves that was supposed to be completed by mentor teachers. In addition to these dishonest portfolio completion practices, often principals and mentor teachers, and even teachers who are not mentors (non-mentor teachers), contact universities to complain about how some student teachers conduct themselves. These are some of the complaints universities received: student teachers arriving late at schools, they do not adhere to the dress codes of the schools, absenteeism without informing the mentor teachers, they are disrespectful towards teachers (e.g. by back chatting) and lastly, student teachers show up unprepared for their lesson presentations. These complaints from the teaching community and falsified documents and signatures in the portfolios were what prompted the research. Although student teachers are orientated for TP in some of the courses, some of them disregard what they are taught. Mentor teachers also discuss (or should discuss) what is expected from student teachers at schools but many student teachers still opt to uphold negative values during their TP period.

3. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

Much research reports and focuses on classroom practices and on student teachers' experiences during TP, but limited research focuses on the moral conduct of student teachers during TP. The aim of the study was to obtain teachers' (mentor teachers, non-mentor teachers and school principals) perceptions of the immoral and unprofessional conduct of some student teachers during TP. This behaviour was evident in TP portfolios that student teachers have to submit, and through the complaints some universities receive from the teaching community. The students in question were Education students from different universities who were placed in different primary and secondary schools.

3.1. Research Question

The main or central research question is a broad question that asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept of the study. It can be followed by associated sub-questions. Research questions typically begin with the words *why* or *what* to convey an open and emerging design (Creswell, 2014). The main research question that guided this research is: What are teachers' perceptions of the moral conduct of some students during teaching practice?

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Exploring the teaching community's views of student teachers' behaviour has the potential for improving the quality and effectiveness of TP and for improving student teachers' behaviour and conduct during TP. It is important for student teachers to put their best foot forward because the manner in which they behave has a direct impact on their interaction with role players such as learners, parents and the school community (Van Nuland, 2009). The manner in which student teachers behave during TP can also be a deciding factor on whether or not they could be employed at the schools where they undertake their TP. If student teachers misbehave, they will hamper the reputation of their tertiary institutions. Dreyer (2015) asserts that student teachers represent their institutions during TP and their good behaviour might open or close doors for other students. The study can assist stakeholders as far as the moral behaviour of student teachers is concerned.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1. Teacher Professionalism

Student teachers are placed at schools mainly to observe lessons, co-teach and teach independently. During this period, they should conduct themselves professionally and ethically. Teacher professionalism is defined as "a combination of training, knowledge, experience, attitudes and moral behaviour that defines the role of a teacher" (Roy et al., 2016, p. 16). It also refers to one's attitude towards one's work and how you approach your work. Becoming a professional teacher begins with initial teacher training. It is thus the responsibility of universities to prepare and educate future teachers about professionalism. Unprofessional behaviour is any type of behaviour that creates difficulties in the workplace with the people you work with (Malan, 2015). Although pre-service teachers are not employed in their respective schools and are not professional teachers yet, they are expected to model behaviour that is professional and ethical. Promoting professionalism of all teachers in South Africa is the vision of SACE (South African Council for Educators). SACE is a statutory council which promotes and monitors professional conduct of teachers and manages continuous professional teacher development in South Africa. In addition, it must uphold ethical practices by teachers (Republic of South Africa, 2002; Drake, Jackson, & Sotuku, 2016). However, it is often difficult to decide whether actions and behaviours can be deemed as professional or unprofessional, and ethical or unethical. In this regard SACE's 'Code of Professional Ethics' is a guide that stipulates how teachers should conduct themselves. Policy documents such as the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 (C-9) stipulate that misconduct refers, amongst others, to a breakdown in the employment relationship and an educator commits misconduct if he or she

- falsifies documents or any other records
- displays disrespect towards others in the workplace (schools decide which actions and behaviour are deemed disrespectful)
- commits an act of dishonesty (schools stipulate in the teachers' code of conduct which actions are deemed dishonest) (Republic of South Africa, 1998).

The SACE code outlines principles of action and standards of behaviour. But professional conduct is not only about how people act - it is also about appearance. When student teachers dress smartly and appropriately, they convey a message that they take their TP seriously.

5.2. Values and their Role in Teaching

Values (or morals) can be perceived as ideals or beliefs that guide our interaction with others in terms of what is good, beneficial, important, useful etc. (De Witt, 2021; Malan, 2015; Nargiza, 2022). Malan (2015) states that values or ethics are a set of rules that regulate our lives and the decisions we make. They are passed down from parents to their children. They are a person's opinion of what is good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable - an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct is preferable. Teachers are supposed to act morally and professionally while they are at work, and unprofessional behaviour is usually unacceptable at schools. Professional behaviour and actions rely on moral principles and these moral principles are helpful in guiding student teachers on how to behave morally during TP. The challenge is that moral principles are often relative to cultures or communities. Different cultures (and therefore different people) have a particular system of norms and values which influences their behaviour towards others (De Witt, 2021). Values influence many activities at school as well as interaction among teachers and interaction among learners and teachers. The question is thus: if values are relative and play such an important role in school activities, which values should guide student teachers' conduct at schools, and even outside of the schools?

5.3. Lack of Positive Values Amongst Students

Moral degeneration or moral decline is the failure to uphold sound morality in our societies and societal institutions such as schools and Higher Education Institutions (Njoku, 2016; Lawal & Ali, 2017). Forms of moral decadence among students are, for example drug abuse, rape, examination malpractice, plagiarism, indecent dressing, bribery, gender-based violence, disobedience and academic fraud, to mention a few (Singh, 2018). This alarming moral decadence is to a large extent the result of immoral behaviour exhibited by students. Globally there exists a general decline of morals in schools and outside schools (Samson & Allida 2018; Fayokun, Adedeji, & Oyebade, 2009). The literature study shows that the youth of today is morally corrupt and bankrupt (Njoku, 2016). Students seem to be belligerent, lazy, unruly, ill-disciplined, disrespectful, materialistic, rude, dishonest and disobedient. They do not adhere to positive values and would much rather display these negative values. There seems to be a general absence of consideration for others amongst students, they are dishonest and display this dishonest behaviour by lying and cheating during assessments, they lack good manners, disrupt lectures, are insincere, refuse to take accountability for their actions, wear suggestive and seductive clothes, use bad language and disregard rules and authority (Joseph, Berry, & Deshpande, 2010; De Klerk & Rens, 2003; Fayokun et al., 2009). Some of this behaviour is not only portrayed while students are at their tertiary institutions, but also at schools during TP. Many students fail to display moral and ethical principles in their behaviour and actions.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1. The Participants

The convenience and purposeful sample consisted of thirty participants: twenty-seven of these were teachers at the schools where student teachers were placed for TP. Three of the participants were principals of schools where student teachers conducted their TP. Convenience sampling was employed because the teachers and principals were available and willing to participate in the research. From the twenty-seven teachers that were interviewed, twenty-four were mentor teachers, while the other three were non-mentor teachers. The participants were from six schools where student teachers conducted their TP.

6.2. Data Collection Method

Face-to-face individual interviews were conducted with the participants and recorded with a cellular phone. The interviews were conducted over a period of six months. Each interview lasted between fifteen to twenty-five minutes. A combination of semi-structured and open-ended questions was asked. This method of interviewing was selected because it is more flexible and allows the interviewees to also ask questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Dakwa, 2015). Some key questions were formulated in advance.

6.3. Findings and Analysis

6.3.1. Thematic Analysis

The aim of qualitative data is to describe and make meaning of phenomena and thus do not require quantification of texts and statistical analysis (Henning, 2004; Creswell, 2014). There are several methods of data analysis that can be used in narrative research design. The data could be in the form of a text, transcript of recorded interviews or documents (Taole & Van Wyk, 2015). The type of data analysis used should be guided by the nature of the research question or questions, the type of data available and the goals of the research. Thematic analysis is particularly beneficial and useful when the research question aims to explore experiences, perceptions, views, opinions and understanding of individuals or groups. Thematic analysis thus seemed the best suitable method for analysis for this study. It is a powerful tool for shedding light on the lived experiences and realities of the participants. Thematic analysis lends itself well to a large volume of rich, detailed data such as in-depth or focus group interviews where participants provide comprehensive accounts of their experiences. There are two approaches to thematic analysis: inductive (the data determines your themes) and deductive (coming to the data with some preconceived themes which you expect to find there, based on theory or existing knowledge) (Dawadi, 2020; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). For this study the researcher adopted the inductive approach.

6.3.2. The Process of Analysing the Data

Thematic analysis is subjective and relies on the researcher's judgement, so the researcher has to reflect carefully on his/her interpretations. The process of coding in thematic analysis is largely inductive, with codes and themes developed from the data itself (bottom-up approach) (Dawadi, 2020; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Analysing structured data differs from analysing unstructured data. Structured data typically come coded, whereas unstructured data are not. Also, qualitative data use words, not numbers - in other interviews gestures and facial expressions are used to express feelings. Because of these reasons it is more difficult to analyse qualitative data. There is no single correct way, no set of rules or a simple recipe that one can follow to analyse qualitative data which will always be appropriate and guarantee good results (Boulton & Hammersley, 2006). Researchers have to be creative, disciplined and follow a systematic approach when analysing data. But the flexibility of qualitative analysis allows researchers to turn raw data into results (Feza, 2015). Despite the complexities of analysing qualitative data, there are six general steps that are typically followed in the analysis of qualitative data (Nowell et al. 2017; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Table 1.
Steps in thematic analysis.

1.	Familiarisation	The first step is to read and examine the data carefully (to look for patterns in the meaning of the data to find broad themes). The researcher has to make sense of the data and then transcribe audio data to text. Decide what to code, what to employ and which codes best represent your content - this is referred to as the coding process.
2.	Look for themes in the codes	Search for coding patterns or themes. Choose topics for your themes. Codes are the building blocks for themes.
3.	Generate themes	Ensure that everything you have classified as a theme matches the data and whether it exists in the data. Make sure you have coded all your themes properly and thoroughly. Sometimes codes may become themes.
4.	Review themes	Read through the themes again and answer these questions: Do the themes make sense? Do the themes overlap? Are there sub-themes? Do the data support the themes? In this stage the researcher compares the themes.
5.	Define, name and finalise themes	Analysis will take shape after reviewing, refining and labelling your themes. Ensure your themes match the research question.
6.	Report writing	The final step is to write the report. The report can include quotes from the interviews, an interpretative analysis and arguments for your claims.

7. DISCUSSION

Below are extracts from some of the questions and the responses from the participants. Some of the responses can be categorised into both themes. The data were analysed manually through the six-step process that is explained in Table 1.

Table 2.
Extracts from interviews and subsequent themes.

Questions	Responses	Themes
<p>Q1: We received complaints from some teachers about the worrisome behaviour of students during teaching practice. Can you give examples of how some students behaved?</p>	<p><u>P1</u>: Many of these students' behaviour is really problematic. <u>P2</u>: <i>We had students from two universities at my school last semester. Generally, they behave well and are respectful. But some of them! A few rotten apples rot the whole box.</i></p>	<p>Question 2 was a follow-up question to question 1. The responses fit the theme of unprofessional behaviour (inappropriate dress-code, late coming, refusal to participate in extra-mural activities). The teachers find this behaviour problematic and disturbing.</p>
<p>Q2: Problematic how? (This was a follow-up question to P1's response)</p>	<p><u>P1</u>: <i>Let me start with the way some of them dress. The other one was wearing jeans so tight she could not even climb the stairs. I mean really. And some come late and want to leave early. For no good reason. They don't want to do extra-murals. And this other one gave me an incomplete lesson plan. I did not mark nor sign it. (The interviewee was shaking her head).</i></p>	<p>Inappropriate dress-code, late-coming, not wanting to participate in extra-curricula activities. This behaviour indicates the unprofessional conduct on the part of some students.</p>
<p>Q3: What about their ethical behaviour? Because some teachers say the students can be disrespectful at times.</p>	<p><u>P3</u>: <i>One came to school drunk one day. We could smell the alcohol from the gate. That's disrespectful and unprofessional. No respect for other teachers, their work and for the rules. And we brief them about the rules and the code of conduct for teachers. The other one lied about the lesson plan. But some are cute and work hard. And have good manners. Why can't they all be like this?</i> <u>P4</u>: <i>And they speak to teachers as if we are their</i></p>	<p>The responses from Question 3 speak to the theme of immoral behaviour (e.g. forgery, lying) and unprofessional behaviour (coming to school intoxicated, speaking to teachers in a disrespectful manner, disregard for rules).</p>

	<p><i>friends. They're not even teachers yet! And some of them – the forms I had to fill in and sign...so untidy! They have no respect for me or their work. No pride! And some are so scared to work.</i></p> <p><i><u>P5</u> (who is a principal): I don't want students from University x at my school anymore. They're so rude some of them. They must go to other schools. I will phone University x and tell them to place their students at other schools.</i></p> <p><i><u>P6</u>: Sometimes they somme fill in forms themselves. I've seen it. Why don't they give the forms to the teacher or teachers that are supposed to complete them? Huh? Is that not forgery?</i></p>	
<p>Q4: What do you think universities can do to change this behaviour?</p>	<p><i><u>P6</u>: Don't the lecturers prepare the students? You must coach them. Give them a contract to sign. A contract that says they must abide by the teacher code of conduct.</i></p> <p><i><u>P7</u>: There are certain things that are not allowed at the schools. Life has rules. Schools have rules. The values in the code of conduct need to be respected.</i></p> <p><i><u>P8</u>: The way some of them behave.....if I were the principal I will never employ them. Some are just plain lazy. They do not know the value of hard work. And they don't know the meaning of please. No manners.</i></p>	<p>Unwillingness of students to adhere to the code of conduct for teachers. They do not obey rules. They do not respect hard work etc. These actions can be categorised in the broader theme of unprofessionalism.</p>

Thematic analysis is typical in qualitative research and was employed through the identification of themes that emerged during the interviews. It emphasises identifying, analysing and interpreting qualitative data patterns. It is a method for describing data, but it also involves interpretation in the process of selecting codes and constructing themes. In thematic analysis the researcher has many options on how to convert 'raw' data to final patterns of meaning, or to results (Dawadi, 2020; Nowell et al, 2017). The researcher opted for qualitative coding and categorising of themes. Meanings were thus conveyed in terms of themes. From the responses of the participants the researcher extrapolated two main themes: unprofessional behaviour and unethical conduct of students. From the responses it is evident that the participants are of the opinion that some student teachers are entitled, have no respect and have no pride in their work ethic. The participants were not impressed with the moral and professional conduct displayed by some of the student teachers.

8. CONCLUSION

Teaching practice is a period when student teachers are placed at schools to gain teaching experience, knowledge and skills. While at the schools they have to fulfill certain roles such as teaching, completing assignments and activities and avail themselves for the opportunity to learn as much as possible. During this period student teachers are expected to adhere to the principles of professionalism and ethical behaviour as stipulated in SACE's 'Code of Professional Ethics'. They also have to adhere to the rules of the schools. Although many students do behave professionally and ethically, the findings indicate that there are those that behave in unacceptable ways during TP. The focus of this chapter was on the students whose conduct is questionable during TP. Some examples that were cited by participants include late coming, laziness, disrespect for teachers and dishonesty. Some of the portfolios were also suspicious - for example, different handwritings were used where one and the same teacher was supposed to complete a form (or forms). This creates the impression of cheating and dishonesty by students. The participants alluded to the fact that this behaviour is unacceptable and should be addressed. As Oduran and Mokoena (2015, p. 28) state, "good teaching requires that teachers have knowledge of the theories and insights that guide what they do as teachers, and knowledge of their own behaviours as teachers".

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

There are various ways of improving student teachers' behaviour during practice. Student teachers should be adequately prepared and orientated by tertiary institutions for TP. They should be trained about their responsibilities and conduct during TP. The SACE code should form part of teacher training programmes (and the teaching practice curriculum) from the 1st year of study. A partnership between schools and universities can be mutually enriching and beneficial for student teachers, universities and teaching communities. This partnership must be based on a common understanding of how student teachers should conduct themselves. Schools need to make clear what student teachers' expectations are - this should ideally be communicated to universities before the students are placed at the schools. Student teachers should be informed of conduct that is rude, disrespectful, dishonest etc. Examples of unacceptable and punishable behaviour (e.g. forgery, stealing, arriving at school intoxicated etc.) should be communicated. Student teachers should be informed about the consequences of any misconduct during TP. They should sign a contract in which they pledge to honour the school's policies and code of conduct. Lastly, Dreyer (2015: p. 6) gives this important recommendation: "student teachers must realise that they are guests in schools during their TP period and must abide by all rules and regulations of the school".

10. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The topic has not yet been fully explored or studied in the existing research literature. This research opens the door for larger discussions. There is much research that can be conducted on the challenging issues of immoral and unprofessional behaviour of pre-service teachers during TP. In order to build a useful body of scholarship around these problems researchers are encouraged to document and share their experiences, pedagogies and findings.

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KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Teaching community: In this study the teaching community refers to mentor teachers, non-mentor teachers, principals and Head of Departments (HODs) at the schools. These are the participants that were interviewed and that sometimes contact the universities with their complaints.

Mentor teachers: These are experienced teachers - often HODs - who are appointed by senior school management to mentor and guide student teachers during their teaching practice. They serve as role models for student teachers. They usually teach the same subjects that student teachers observe or teach during teaching practice.

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Non-mentor teachers: Teachers who work at schools but are not appointed to mentor student teachers. They do occasionally work with student teachers, for example during subject meetings that have to be attended by student teachers.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DHET	- Department of Higher Education and Training
HOD	- Head of Department
PGCE	- Post Graduate Certificate in Education
SACE	- South African Council for Educators

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