

## From theory to practice: Beginner teachers' experiences of the rigour of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education programme

Vuyokazi Nomlomo and Zilungile Sosibo

### Abstract

This article focuses on how recent graduates perceive the rigour of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) initial teacher education (ITE) programme. The article is based on qualitative data collected from a purposely selected sample of 19 beginner teachers who graduated from two higher education institutions that offer PGCE programmes in the Western Cape. Data were primarily collected by means of open-ended semi-structured interviews and triangulated through document analysis. Results revealed how beginner teachers' conceptions of rigour of the ITE programme differ considerably from those advocated by experts on teacher education. The authors of this paper recommend that if rigour in teacher education programmes is to be understood, voices of student teachers and other stakeholders (e.g. teachers, school principals, communities, policy makers) should be included in the design and development of teacher-education curricula. Inclusion of these voices might constructively complement existing conceptions of rigour and influence ITE curriculum policy for the benefit of all stakeholders. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that some of these conceptions of rigour might not be informed by theoretical underpinnings and can therefore not supersede those of the experts.

### 1. Introduction and background

During the apartheid era, initial teacher education (ITE) in South Africa was offered in teacher training colleges that were racially segregated (Pournara, 2009). The new democratic dispensation that followed the demise of the apartheid system in 1994 brought many changes in higher education and teacher education. Within this dispensation, the Department of Education (1997), through its notice 1196 of 1997, *White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa* transformed the education system by introducing new curricula underpinned by principles of access, redress and social justice (Sayed & Motala, 2012; Kanjee, Sayed & Rodriguez, 2010). Two major changes in higher education were the integration of teacher training colleges into universities (Pournara, 2009) and the upgrading of Teachers' Certificate, Diploma and Higher Diploma courses into two qualifications: the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2011: 15).









































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