

**Exploring Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Qualities in
Secondary Education: A Mixed-Method Study**

Lynn Sheridan

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Abstract

A significant gap in teacher education literature is the lack of ‘voice’ of the pre-service teacher Jegede et al., (2000). Although discourse in teacher education details: a number of learning theory models and methods of knowledge acquisition; the importance of pedagogical practice; the development of personal professional values and beliefs; and, the development of pre-service teachers’ professional identity only rarely is the pre-service teachers’ perspective sought (Bransford et al., 2000; Butler 1992; Combs et al., 1978; Duffy 2009; Solomon et al. 2004; Porter & Brophy 1988; Ferguson & Womcak 1993). This suggests that much of the discourse mirrors the understandings and practices of experts rather than pre-service teachers. This study focuses on the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of valued teacher qualities as they progress to graduate teacher and aims to identify pre-service teachers’ perceptions of effective secondary teacher qualities (attitudes, knowledge and skills) as they progress through their four-year undergraduate degree.

A mixed-methods approach to the research design was adopted. Combining methodological approaches allowed for a more comprehensive collection of evidence providing a fuller understanding from which to address the research question. In clarifying the study’s findings, the mixed methodology revealed a range of assumptions about reality and knowledge that served to guide the construction of the research problem, choice of research methods and extended the breadth and depth of the enquiry. The pre-service teachers’ evolving beliefs on teacher qualities were viewed as being socially constructed with meaning created within their social context. A post-positivist perspective was taken, which assumes a scientific approach to research requiring that quantitative data be used in

a reductionist and logical way with an emphasis on empirical data collection. This was most suited to the multi-year, pre- and post-survey approach used in the study because it allowed the researcher to distil a large body of information into meaningful categories. To explore the pre-service teachers' perceptions fully, this study also used focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The interviews were used to examine the views of teacher educator experts and pre-service teachers.

The complexity of the research question required the gathering of multiple forms of data from diverse groups. The mixed-methods approach of design and analysis was based on the Exploratory Design outlined by Creswell, Planto Clark, Gutmann and Hanson (2003, pp. 75–79). The interpretations of the combined quantitative and qualitative findings were categorised in a series of constructs, depicting aspects of pre-service teachers' perceptions of teacher qualities over time including demographic influences, knowledge, pedagogy, interpersonal and professional qualities, notions of 'the good teacher', the developmental story and the behind-the-scenes influence of the teacher educators, and external factors.

The Shifting Perceptions Model that was generated from the research (see Figure 13.1) highlights the continuum of practice for the pre-service teacher. This model shows the pre-service teachers' changing perceptions and allows exploration of the interactions and relationships between the constructs derived from this research. This model shows the transition of the pre-service teacher from somewhat egocentric to more student-centric as they progress towards becoming a graduate teacher.

The pre-service teachers' prior experiences, age and gender influenced their perceptions. Perceptions were not fixed because their views (on knowledge, pedagogy professional and interpersonal qualities) differed in response to new learning or new

priorities. Learning for the pre-service teacher was developmental, moving from the focus on self to a deeper, more insightful ethical, professional view of themselves.

Further, the study revealed the complex nature of the hidden curriculum stemming from the teacher educators' personal aspirations and external factors that affected course design. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will contribute to understanding the often-'neglected' voice of the pre-service teacher and will inform discourse on how to guide future teacher education.

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List of Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACSA	Australian Curriculum Studies Association
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ANOVA	analysis of variance
DET	Department of Education and Training
ESD	exploratory sequence design
FG1	Focus Group 1
FG2	Focus Group 2
ICT	information and communication technologies
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NCATE	National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
NSW	New South Wales
NSWDET	New South Wales Department of Education and Training
NSWIT	NSW Institute of Teachers
OHS	occupational health and safety
PCA	principal component analysis
PCK	pedagogical content knowledge
PDHPE	personal development, health and physical education
PE	physical education
PIK	pedagogical interpersonal and knowledge
PPP	pedagogical professional practices
TAFE	Technical and Further Education