



# The impact of the apprenticeship of observation on pre-service teachers' perceptions of teaching

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## Abstract

First year pre-service teachers' images of, and beliefs about, teaching are formed over years of prior educational experiences and these images exert a powerful effect on their perceptions of teaching. In this paper, I examine the impact of the apprenticeship of observation on the developing professional identity of two cohorts of first-year pre-service teachers at a South African tertiary institution. I use Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) to explore the perceptions and expectations with which pre-service teachers enter their initial teacher program. I argue that these deeply rooted ways of thinking about teachers and what they do should be acknowledged, challenged, and disrupted, and pre-service teachers should be supported in efforts to scrutinise their local knowledge and lived experience that constitute their dominant discourses about teaching and being a full-time teacher. The findings indicate that students have a naïve understanding of the teaching profession and confirm that the apprenticeship of observation serves as a measure of their own ability or inability to teach. Recommendations highlight the opportunity for tertiary educators to empower pre-service teachers in their journey towards an ethical and caring professional identity.

**Keywords:** apprenticeship of observation, pre-service teacher, perceptions, professional identity

## Introduction

After twelve years of basic education, pre-service teachers undertake the next step in their education with a lifetime of experiences and opinions regarding teaching. This is understandable considering that the average learner spends more than 14,000 hours in a school observing teachers (Good & Lavigne, 2018). In addition, pre-service teachers enter teaching programmes with a clear definition of what they think the job of a teacher entails (Konig & Rothland, 2012; Lortie, 1975; McPhail, 2015; Palmer et al., 2009). In an attempt to address this phenomenon, Lortie (1975) conceptualised the notion of an apprenticeship of observation; he postulated that pre-service teachers have a predetermined set of ideas about

teaching and what it entails. This will directly influence their perceptions of teaching and the development of their own professional identity.

Should Lortie's apprenticeship of observation be considered as a viable explanation for the perceptions that first-year pre-service teachers bring to university, it can be deduced that the foundation of a teacher's professional identity is conceptualised long before they enrol for their first class at university or enter a school for teaching practice (Bergman et al., 2018; Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Jackson, 2017; Vinogradova & Haskell Ross, 2019).

## Research objective

Working towards quality initial teacher education in South Africa requires a critical view of current practice as well as of the expectations and experiences of both pre-service teachers and teacher educators. In this study, I aim to contribute to the growing body of knowledge geared towards the improvement of initial teacher education. The study, as well as the discussion that follows, is guided by the research question:

To what extent can the apprenticeship of observation impact first-year pre-service teachers' perceptions of teaching?

In this phenomenological study, I examine the impact of the apprenticeship of observation on first-year pre-service teachers. I explore the experiences that first year B.Ed students bring to their new context during their first week at university and shed light on the impact of the apprenticeship of observation on their perceptions of what their future career of being a teacher entails. The data highlights first-year pre-service teachers' perceptions about the knowledge, skills, and values of a good teacher, and their definition of best practice in relation to memorable events they experienced in the classroom.

This will highlight the reasons why some first-year students feel, before they have had any formal lectures or teaching, that they are capable of immediately accepting a full-time teaching position or why they are willing to explore the reasons why others do not feel instantly ready to be a full-time teacher.

I suggest how the awareness of the impact of the apprenticeship of observation can help first-year pre-service teachers as they transition into tertiary education and can help them to connect critically their experiences as learners at school with their current perception of what teachers do. I recommend that tertiary institutions acknowledge, as part of the process of the professional development of pre-service teachers, the apprenticeship of observation. This will help first-years to deconstruct what have become for them dominant discourses relating to their professional development as teachers.

## Theoretical framework

Transition theory, initially developed by Schlossberg (1981), is described as a model "in which transitions of all kinds . . . can be analysed, and possible interventions formulated"

(Schlossberg, 1981, p. 3). Schlossberg et al. (1995, p. 27) have defined a transition as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles.” The move from being a learner to being a first-year pre-service teacher can therefore be considered a valid example of a transition.

In her theory, Schlossberg (1981) refers to three phases of this transition theory. In the first phase, referred to as “approaching transitions”, the perceptions and experiences with which an individual enters the process of transition from one context to the next, are explored. Schlossberg et al. (1995) have referred to this as the process of moving in, moving through, and moving out of a transition. The focus during this phase is on defining the specific transition (in this case the decision to become a teacher and enrol for a pre-service teaching program). In the second phase attention is paid to investigating events and identifying strategies that are used to cope with the transition and the results of the transition (in this case considering the role of the apprenticeship of observation on a student’s perception and experiences as a first-year student). In the third phase, not addressed in this study, those who transition can explore options for personal and professional growth. This theory therefore presents an integrated and holistic overview of the process of transition from being a learner, to being a pre-service teacher, and, eventually, to being a full-time teacher.

### Defining the transition

In examining first-year students and their expectations of universities, Martin (2010) stressed that education systems do not foster collaboration between secondary schools and tertiary studies. However, she identified high school teachers as having the most influence over the development of students’ tertiary expectations. This accentuates the importance of acknowledging this transitional space in which first-year pre-service teachers find themselves. A conscious awareness of transferring what a learner has seen from one context to the other as Lunsmann et al. (2019) have noted, is necessary to assist first-year pre-service teachers to define and manage the transition from pre-service to full-time teacher.

This space in which first-year pre-service teachers find themselves can be a very challenging since they have been pulled from safety, bringing with them into the unknown expectations and perceptions about tertiary education and teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This may render these students very vulnerable. The content that first-years bring into the transition will impact the way in which they make meaning of their lived experience and local knowledge (Sayed et al., 2018). It will always have an impact on how they perceive and receive the new knowledge conveyed to them and the connections they make between the old and new sets of knowledge and ways of thinking.

This socially constructed process with its focus on the ontological rather than the epistemological journey of becoming a student and eventually a teacher, is directly related to the process of forming a professional identity. This is, however, never a generic, linear, and simple one-size-fits-all event, but is, rather, a complex and diverse process in which the idiosyncrasies of unique students should be valued and celebrated.

## Developing a pre-professional identity

Pre-service teachers in this transition undergo this period of struggle as a result of inhabiting a betwixt space, based on the notion of liminality. The concept was first applied by van Gennep (1909/1960) in social anthropology to describe the in-between status of individuals at threshold points in rituals of transformation. It describes a state in which a student has left behind her/his previous self as a school learner but has not yet become the new self.

Being a first-year pre-service teacher is a betwixt space between an old identity as a school learner and a new identity as a pre-service teacher and potential full-time teacher. I suggest that this betwixt space in which first-year pre-service teachers find themselves, can also be considered part of a pre-professional identity. Jackson (2017), for example, describes such a pre-professional identity as a less mature version of professional identity. Here, students are becoming, rather than being professionals. This process of becoming and managing the transition is directly related to, and built upon, the apprenticeship of observation. Howell (2012, p. 43) concurred with the essence of this challenge when he stated that “the most persistent dilemma that remains a barrier to students of teaching becoming reflective knowers, thinkers, and doers, is their own narrow view of schools, children, and learning when they begin their teacher education programs.”

## The apprenticeship of observation

Various previous studies have documented both the positive and negative effect of the apprenticeship of observation on this transition and pre-professional identity of pre-service teachers (Boyd et al., 2013; Conner & Vary, 2017; Grossman, 1991; Knapp, 2012; Lunsman et al., 2019; Mewborn & Tyminski, 2006; Vinogradova & Haskell Ross, 2019). The seminal work of Darling-Hammond (2006) also identified the apprenticeship of observation as one of the three major challenges encountered in initial teacher education. Countering the deeply held beliefs derived from the apprenticeship of observation “may be one of the most powerful challenges in learning to teach” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 36). Mewborn and Tyminski (2006) suggested that the autobiographical memories of students could be explored not only to affirm their choice of teaching as a career, but also to reflect critically on what previous knowledge they bring to teaching programs. These memories could also work to help them embrace their ability to reflect and learn. Boyd et al. (2013) affirmed these findings in their study that used blogging to facilitate autobiographical reflection. Additionally, Conner and Vary (2017) explored the role of the apprenticeship of observation in student-faculty pedagogical partnerships and Lunsman et al. (2019) did so in mentor-mentee relationships. Through this study I contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the value of acknowledging the role of the apprenticeship of observation in a pre-service teacher’s initial teacher education program.

The essence of the apprenticeship of observation to which Lortie (1975) refers is that all teachers were learners at one time and all have had a plethora of experiences and events and, for the most part, a number of teachers. Each pre-service teacher already has extensive

knowledge of what teachers do in classrooms, but very little understanding of the professional and personal reasoning behind these actions. They do not have a realistic perception of what happens before and after the lesson of which they were part. They do not comprehend how much time is spent on planning, grading, and other tasks related to teaching practice (Boyd et al., 2013). In addition, learners are not aware of the pedagogical and methodological considerations teachers make every day, nor are they exposed to the challenge teachers face in terms of teaching, assessment, dealing with curriculum, and coping with learners, parents, etc. Learners do not develop analytic orientations toward the tasks of a teacher (Bullock, 2011). For the learner, teaching is what happens during the direct contact with the teacher. So, what implications does this view have for becoming a professional teacher and, therefore, for initial teacher education programmes?

### Challenges of the apprenticeship of observation

The apprenticeship of observation poses three challenges to pre-service teachers (Conner & Vary, 2017). First, students enter initial teacher education programs with the dominant experiences and narrative of only one learner, namely themselves. They have a limited understanding of the experiences of other students who might learn in different ways than they do and who have different criteria for good teaching. They might therefore favour teaching styles that suit their individual needs and preferences, rather than think in a more encompassing manner. Second, their concept of best and worst practice is limited to what they have seen and experienced during their own schooling. They may lack knowledge of diverse teaching strategies. Third, as I go on to discuss in detail, learners do not always have a full understanding of the extent of the work that teachers do. They do not understand the demands of differentiation to include diversity, to deal with sensitive matters, and to cope with personal challenges. It is crucial that teacher educators become aware of the influence of the apprenticeship of observation and the challenges that it poses to pre-service teachers.

## Methodology

In this qualitative study, I employed a phenomenological design to explore the perceptions and experiences of a convenience sample of two cohorts of first-year pre-service teachers in 2019 and 2020. These pre-service teachers were part of the first-year enrolment for a program in initial teacher education at a tertiary institution in South Africa over two consecutive years. Data for each cohort was gathered at the end of the First Year Orientation Program only five days after students had arrived on campus for the start of their tertiary education. This was crucial to ensure that the opinions students expressed had not yet been influenced by lectures they attended. This meant that it was most likely that the perceptions and experiences that participants shared were those with which they entered university.

I gathered data on the last day of the Orientation Program that dealt mostly with logistics and introduction to the program and to the campus. Students were assured that participation was not compulsory and that they would not be negatively affected for not taking part. In total, 198 B.Ed students took part in the research study across the two years.

Students who chose to take part were asked to answer the following question: “Should a principal now offer you a permanent teaching position, do you think that you would accept it and be capable of being a full-time teacher?” Participants were invited to write down “yes” or “no” followed by a short narrative as motivation for their answer.

I then individually and collectively analysed the data in order to code and identify themes related to the research question. During coding and triangulation, following Clandinin and Connelly (1995), I placed emphasis on understanding and disseminating the data through the lens of the narrative perspective.

Ethical clearance was obtained, and I adhered to the regulations for ethical conduct during the research. I was also a lecturer to these students, so I remained aware of, and sensitive to, the power differential between the students and me.

## Limitations

To ensure academic integrity, it is important to elucidate the limitations of this study. It relied solely on one data source, namely the narratives of two cohorts of first-year pre-service teachers so the findings cannot be generalized. This could be considered a narrow opinion and it could be suggested that triangulation could have been achieved by including other sources of data, like, for instance, reflective journals, the outcome of focus groups and so on. In my opinion, for a research question of limited scope, this one source did indeed provide saturated data since there were many participants. This meant that the design of this study was adequate for the purpose of exploring the role of the apprenticeship of observation at the beginning stages of a pre-service teacher education program. There is, however, room for a follow-up study that could explore the continued role of the apprenticeship in these cohorts of students as they progress through their pre-service teacher training. Such a study could then use a greater variety of methods and a larger and more representative sample of participants.

## Findings

As mentioned above, two cohorts of first-year teachers in an initial teacher education program at a university in South Africa were asked whether they would now, five days into their university experience, be willing to, and capable of, ceasing their studies and assuming a full-time teaching job. In South Africa, most first-year teachers enter university directly after completion of their secondary schooling, so most of them were 18- or 19-year-olds.

Approximately 40% of the participants indicated that they did not feel ready to accept a full-time teaching job. They expressed a strong need for the formal training program for which they were enrolled and their primary motivation for this could be classified as being related to learning about the academic components of teaching. The responses from these pre-service teachers were strongly focused on their academic success as teachers. The remaining 60% who indicated that they did indeed feel ready right then, without any formal training, to

assume a teaching position, listed caring and passion for teaching as their primary motivation. These responses indicated a strong focus on their emotional success as a teacher.

I identified three main categories related to both the positive and negative opinions pre-service teachers had about taking on a full-time teaching position in terms of which the data was encoded: 1) participants' opinions about the learners; 2) their opinions about themselves as teachers; and 3) their opinions about the task of teaching. All these categories were related directly to the concept of the apprenticeship of observation.

Table 1 presents a summary of the findings that will be discussed in more detail below.

**Table 1:** Summary of findings

	<b>Yes! I can teach now (60%)</b>	<b>No! I cannot teach now (40%)</b>
The learner	<p>It is dependent on the age of the learners</p> <p>It is passion or calling and pre-service teachers want to start making a difference as soon as possible</p> <p>The love of children is enough to make successful teachers</p>	<p>Realize that they do not know how to work with children</p> <p>Do not have the skills needed to handle sensitive and difficult situations</p> <p>Concerned about emotional experience of learners</p> <p>Do not want to harm children or cause detriment or negatively influence their future</p>
The teacher	<p>Studies can be finished through a distance learning program instead of a full-time campus-based program</p> <p>The desire to be a role model</p> <p>Having parents who are teachers, too</p> <p>Consider themselves as fast learners and as being very adaptable</p>	<p>A realisation that there still is a lot to learn</p> <p>Lacking the necessary level of confidence</p>
The task of teaching	<p>Having seen the tasks of a teacher being done, when they are in the same situation they will know what to do</p> <p>Having experience through being a tutor, helping peers, etc.</p> <p>A sense of confidence that they already have the skills they perceive a good teacher needs</p>	<p>An awareness of a lack of experience in the process of teaching</p> <p>Lack of academic content knowledge needed to teach the phase or subject</p> <p>A need for more formal training</p> <p>Lack of skills a good teacher needs</p> <p>Do not know the processes and techniques used to teach learners</p>
	<b>Focused on emotional efficacy</b>	<b>Focused on academic efficacy</b>

The dominant narrative shared by participants indicated the strong impact of the apprenticeship of observation in both pre-service teachers who felt ready to take on a

teaching job as well as those students who realized that they might not be ready yet. As depicted in table 1, 60% of the participants indicated a willingness to accept a full-time position right away, while the other 40% expressed very clearly that they were not ready.

Yes! I can teach now

*Reaffirming the apprenticeship*

The dominant discourse around these first-year pre-service teachers' perceptions affirms the apprenticeship of observation that is based on the belief that because they have seen it being done for twelve years, they have the necessary understanding and many of the skills needed to be a teacher themselves.

I have seen good and bad teachers during my school career. I am ready to now do it myself. (Participant 59)

I know exactly what is expected of a teacher. I sat in a school desk for twelve years. I just need to learn to cope with the workload. (Participant 98)

I am barely out of school for two months. I can still remember how things are done. (Participant 142)

Some participants (including participants 12, 78, and 141) stated that they had paid close attention to their teachers so they now felt that they possessed the basic skills needed to be teachers themselves. The findings are, however, not clear on exactly what they observed. Perhaps they indicate a basic observation of lesson presentation rather than a critical reflection on pedagogical principles?

In addition, there is another level of influence that the apprentice of observation could have on the perceptions of first-year pre-service teachers. There is clear evidence that pre-service teachers who grew up in a home with a parent or even a grandparent who is or was a teacher, feel that through observing these loved ones, they have a better understanding of what the job of a teacher entails. This is also very often presented as their primary motivation for deciding to become a teacher. This living with a teacher could even be considered another apprenticeship of observation that these students undergo. It could be argued that these particular pre-service teachers may have a better understanding of the behind-the-scenes work of a teacher, but they have also had a very one-dimensional exposure to teaching.

Other participants listed experience of being a tutor as evidence that they possessed the skills needed to be a good teacher.

For the past three years I have helping my former school mates with accounting. (Participant 17)



I had to teach my friends the work we had to do in class because the teacher was too lazy to do it and I believe I did a great job because they all understood the work after I explained it. (Participant 117)

The question about what these pre-service teachers' fellow learners did indeed understand and what the measure or criteria for that understanding was, needs to be asked

#### *A naïve and limited approach*

Several participants stated that they wanted to become teachers because of their passion for teaching and their love of children. These pre-service teachers either want to recreate the caring environment they experienced at school or create such an environment for their learners because they did not experience this during their own schooling.

The participants in this study who indicated a willingness to enter the profession right away clearly offered emotional reasons as the primary motivation behind their answer to the research question. Their answers seem almost naïve given what they perceive the tasks of a teacher to be. They simplify the complexity of the task of teaching into merely caring for children and wanting to make a difference in their lives.

Participant 50 stated that teaching was her calling and therefore she was excited at the prospect of being a teacher as soon as possible. This sentiment was shared by participants who indicated that they felt that having a passionate calling was all you needed to be a successful teacher. "I might not have experience, but I will use my passion" said Participant 24. The opinion that "if your heart is in it, it cannot be that difficult" voiced by Participant 132, was popular.

Another level of naivety about the complexity of the job can be seen in these comments that lack insight.

This is dependent on the age of the learners. I think I will now already be able to teach grade 1, but I will not be able to teach grade 12. (Participant 57)

I think I will definitely be able to teach the easy stuff like reading and writing. (Participant 3)

Other comments included "I'm a fast learner and how hard can it really be?" (Participant 42). It would appear that some participants believe that if you are passionate about the job and you truly care about children, training is unnecessary.

The love of children is what most participants appear to think of as a golden thread and it runs through the answers of most participants who indicated that they were willing to enter full time teaching immediately.

I can't even wait to stand in front of a class full of sweetest souls who are hungry to learn. (Participant 14).

The danger is that such perceptions could lead to disillusionment during teaching practice or when these participants are beginner teachers. Many of the opinions of pre-service teachers who gave an affirmative answer to the research question seemed to be self-centred. This could be another indication of the effects of the apprenticeship of observation in their lives. They based their responses on their personal experiences and observations rather than on those of the learners they would come to teach. Comments like “I know myself well” (Participant 92) and “I am very patient” (Participant 77) show a very limited view of the requirements of a good teacher. Such views are encapsulated well in the following statement by Participant 118.

You do not specifically need university training to be a good teacher, you need certain characteristics which you can't learn, you must have it in you already.

As shown in the table above, emotional efficacy seemed to be a very important motivator. It is clear that these pre-service teachers viewed themselves as future role models who wanted to change the lives of children in the same way they saw some teachers at their schools doing. They want to be an inspiration and live out what they see to be their calling. We have to question whether this might be at the expense of subject knowledge, teaching methodology, and other pedagogical principles. Participants who indicated that they did not see themselves as fit right now to be in a teaching position, seemed, rather, to be focused on the responsibility of academic teaching they would be expected to do as full-time teachers.

#### No! I can't teach now

The disseminated data from pre-service teachers who gave a negative answer to the research question also affirms the role of the apprenticeship of observation on these participants, but it does indicate a more critical analysis of the apprenticeship. The responses from these pre-service teachers portrays a greater awareness of the complexity of the job and the responsibilities with which a teacher is entrusted.

Most participants in this category who expressed the need for much more formal training before they could enter the teaching profession built their opinion on two dominant themes. First, they acknowledged their own lack of academic and subject related knowledge, and, second, they were concerned with their lack of skills for working with children and being able to convey knowledge to them as well as deal with sensitive and complicated situations relating to learners.

Rather than citing a passion for the career or for caring for children, their focus is on the intellectual and holistic wellbeing of the learner and the great responsibility that teachers have in this regard.

#### *Content knowledge*

Before I started with my studies my answer would have been yes, I could teach now! But orientation made me realize that teachers have to deal with a lot . . . a lot more challenges . . . I have no idea how to teach my chosen subject. (Participant 162)

After only five days at university I already realise that there are so [many] more elements to teaching a lesson than I initially thought. (Participant 39)

Several participants indicated a lack of subject knowledge. It was interesting to note that many participants were concerned with not having the knowledge to teach their chosen subject, while others focused their concern on not having the knowledge on *how* to teach the subject.

Even though I was in a school for 12 years, even though I saw teaching every day, I just have no idea how to teach. (Participant 9)

### *First do no harm*

I would not know where or how to begin. I want to ensure that when I educate children . . . I am doing it the right way, with the right tools. (Participant 150).

This response hints at the importance of pedagogical content knowledge. The altruistic and caring nature of a teacher seemed, in this case, to be more focused on the wellbeing of the learners than on the teacher validating his or her own calling.

I think that it would be irresponsible of me and unfair to the [learners] as I am not yet prepared enough to give them the education they deserve. (Participant 111)

I don't want to play around and mess with learners' futures. I believe that becoming a teacher is a serious thing. (Participant 32)

This group of participants seemed to have a different view of the experiences they had while they were in school. There was also a greater awareness of the logistical and administrative challenges with which teachers deal. These participants might have a more realistic view of the complexity of teaching.

As indicated, the findings from this study show that more than half of the pre-service teachers indicated a willingness to accept a full-time teaching position right away. This is however not indicative of the fact that the apprenticeship of observation plays a larger role in their lives. Rather, it indicates that they might be focused on other aspects of the apprenticeship than those participants who indicated that they needed more formal training before they could be employed as a teacher.

The findings in this study create a background from which recommendations can be made on how faculty should acknowledge and address the role of the apprenticeship of observation in the perceptions of first-year pre-service teachers.

## **Recommendations**

In this article I ask whether tertiary institutions pay enough attention to the impact of the apprenticeship of observation and whether initial teacher education programs acknowledge

and address these prior experiences and pre-conceptions of teaching. Many studies (Bergman et al., 2018; Boyd et al., 2013; Jackson, 2017; Sayed et al., 2018) show that should such pre-conceptions stay unexamined, they are likely to remain unchallenged and will have a great influence on the professional identity and praxis of the pre-service teacher.

It is clear from the findings of this study that first-year pre-service teachers find themselves still standing in two worlds. On the one hand, they have a preconceived idea of what full-time teaching entails that is built on their own perceptions and experiences. On the other, after being exposed to an orientation program at their tertiary institution, many begin to question these perceptions and beliefs. They might even already have started the process of deconstructing this apprenticeship of observation. It is clear from the data that some students are, however, still lead by their apprenticeship and therefore feel that they possess the necessary skills it takes to be a full-time teacher, even if such self-assessment is based on their caring nature. It can therefore be postulated that, should the apprenticeship not be addressed, these students can find themselves either resistant to change, or conflicted between what they are being taught by lecturers (and inadvertently then the new apprenticeship that is developing) and the old perpetuated by what they experienced at school.

As part of acknowledging and addressing the notion of apprenticeship by observation, the task of universities is twofold. First, on an individual level, a safe space should be provided in which pre-service teachers can develop the confidence to examine critically their perceptions and beliefs about teaching, acknowledge the role these play in their lives, and be open to deconstructing the old apprenticeship and constructing new knowledge and ideas that could develop as part of their professional identity. This should be an integrated approach that is modelled in the behaviour of the lecturer and in the new apprenticeship that the pre-service teacher is forming. Second, these aspects should be embedded in the curriculum (including the hidden curriculum) of the initial teacher education program, and specifically addressed through teaching practice. In this manner, teaching practice becomes the vehicle for testing progress in the process of deconstructing the apprenticeship of observation and constructing a professional identity. Through creating an awareness of situations, including stressful ones, in which pre-service teachers tend to fall back on the notions belonging to their apprenticeship of observation rather than on strategies they are being taught at university, they may be equipped to deal proactively with such situations.

It cannot be assumed that some efficient strategies might not already be in place in many institutions that provide initial teacher education programs. Many of these practices might be valuable in addressing the issue at hand even if they were implemented originally for other reasons. An acute awareness of the impact of this apprenticeship of observation on the perceptions of pre-service teachers might invite tertiary institutions to reflect critically on these practices and revisit them, or consider additional measures to address this issue.

Such practical examples could include the curriculum of orientation and the approach to it as well as the subsequent initial training program where pre-service teachers are invited to

- unpack and explore prior learning experiences that can influence current approaches to teaching;
- reflect on and deconstruct their own apprenticeship of observation;
- critically reflect on their previous teachers, including their pedagogical actions as well as epistemological stances;
- define what they consider to be best practice and examine their reasons for considering certain actions as such;
- select characteristics from previous teachers and combine them to conceptualize their own professional identity that focuses on both academic and soft skills;
- realise that initial teacher education is also an apprenticeship and be critical of their perceptions in this regard; and
- develop a culture of reflective practice.

Tertiary institutions should also acknowledge the role of teacher educators in disrupting or strengthening the apprenticeship of observation in pre-service teachers, highlighting the fact that these students do not enter tertiary education with only one apprenticeship since they actually live through another apprenticeship throughout their years of teacher training. Slekar (1998, p. 494) concluded that prospective teachers “will replicate their apprenticeship of observations if they are not provided with the opportunity to explore their prior beliefs about teaching and learning history, and actually witness and experiment with alternative approaches”

## Conclusion

First-year pre-service teachers’ perceptions and expectations are formed over years of educational experiences and images of these experiences exert a powerful impact on their developing professional identity. These perceptions are embedded in an apprenticeship of observation that serves to measure their own ability or inability. Acknowledging this impact of the apprenticeship of observation on first-year pre-service teachers not only poses a great challenge to the pre-service teachers themselves, but also constitutes a critical pedagogical challenge for tertiary institutions. These deeply rooted ways of thinking about teaching and what teachers do should be acknowledged, disrupted, and challenged and pre-service teachers should be supported in the effort to create their own local knowledge and lived experience that can constitute their dominant discourses about teaching and being a full-time teacher.

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