

Chapter 8

Course Development: Feedback and Video to Improve Teaching Capacity

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the impact of feedback as dialogue and video use in a new science methods course that was created to meet new governmental requirements. National demands increased the evidence required by preservice teachers to demonstrate quality teaching and learning in initial teacher education programs impacting on program and course design. This led to increasing reflective opportunities and demonstrating knowledge of subject content for preservice teachers in one small metropolitan university. The ability of 32 preservice teachers to reflect on teaching strategies and their subject knowledge as part of a video teaching assignment with peers in a university classroom is described and discussed. Results indicated high participation in dialogue and dialogic feedback. Personal reflections revealed preservice teachers' understanding of teaching strategies, pedagogies, and subject knowledge improved with support. This has implications for final year preservice teacher progress where they need to demonstrate graduate requirements to transition into the profession.

INTRODUCTION

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs in Australia respond to regulatory bodies such as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) that shape and guide the education programs and the professional learning of education Preservice Teachers (PSTs). AITSL policies are designed to prepare preservice teachers to become quality teachers who know the subject matter, can apply appropriate teaching strategies to engage all learners and can reflect on their practice and on student learning effectively. The intentions are worthy and understandable; however, these policies create pressure at the university level to ensure all PSTs meet these expectations and high standards. Therefore, the course

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design, course activities and assessment need careful consideration. The use of effective feedback during course activities and assessment including the use of video to reflect on teaching performance can have a positive impact on developing quality preservice teachers (Star & Strickland, 2008).

BACKGROUND

In a Bachelor of Primary Education program in Queensland, Australia, new courses needed to be designed to become part of a specialization or subject-focus. This new design consideration was a national government level response to continuing poor standardized test results in Australia, such as those from the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Adams, 2012). Each university was able to decide on their specialization focus based upon the needs of the local schools. This particular university provided two subject choices. Preservice teachers (PSTs) had the option of choosing English or Science as their subject-focus. A subject-focus has four courses (semester long classes) that gradually develop the PSTs' teaching capacity in that subject area. The four subject-focus courses were taken in the second and third years with the final course planned for second semester of the third year. These four courses were sequenced in a developmental manner so that more familiar concepts such as biology were taken first to develop confidence and basic science teaching skills. The last two courses covered content such as physical and chemical science that most PSTs had little to no background in and space science where many misconceptions were held. The developmental nature of the science courses and the feedback provided throughout the courses were expected to support preservice teacher learning for greater success in the final subject-focus course. Feedback in these science courses was embedded in collaborative activities whereby PSTs switched between involvement as a learner and involvement as a teacher. Discussions were at the heart of the feedback process.

Feedback during the four science courses took three forms; feedback through inquiry activities, feedback through dialogue and feedback on assessment. Feedback through inquiry activities involved testing out PSTs' own ideas and identifying if their conceptions were accurate or needed adjusting. PSTs could see outcomes for themselves and would have opportunity to explain/discuss what happened and therefore led to a change in misconceptions. Feedback through dialogue refers to the conversations between tutor and PSTs during tutorials. These conversations identified PST understanding and attempted to build upon that understanding. PSTs could freely add to the conversation in many ways, e.g.: describing observations and experiences, attempting to explain observations, challenging others' ideas, and so on. Feedback on assessment was in the form of written comments that identified concepts they did understand and those they were still trying to understand. Clarification of the concepts in context were made as needed. For example, within a tutorial, a model would be revisited to clarify remaining misconceptions. This information allowed PSTs to continue to act on their learning needs.

The final subject-focus course had specifications from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) that expected the course to provide opportunity for PSTs to demonstrate 'expert' level knowledge of subject content and subject specific teaching strategies. For example, the year 5 Earth and Space curriculum contains: modelling the relative size of and distance between Earth, and other planets in the Solar System and the Sun. These are very abstract concepts and have commonly been taught through the creation of paper mâché placed on balloons to represent the planets and the Sun. These are often painted to represent the planets then hung from the ceiling in their order from the

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