Chapter 14
Performance Assessment in Teacher Education Programs:
Direct Evaluation of Teaching Ability

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ABSTRACT

Performance assessment has emerged as a useful measure of teacher performance and is a valuable form of assessment. The chapter elaborates on the benefits of performance assessment in pre-service teacher training and will present findings of a study which focuses on two English Language Didactics courses of a Higher Education pre-service teacher training program for potential secondary state school ELT teachers of the Republic of Cyprus. The aim of the research was to investigate the trainees' progress, potential teaching ability, and confidence via the means of their assessment. The study conducted supported a mixed method approach, where there was sequential data gathering. The initial phase involved direct observations of student teachers' performance in combination with an evaluation of the lesson plans they would follow. This process informed the second type of data collection, which was conducted via evaluation forms, where student teachers were given the opportunity to evaluate and reflect upon the assessment process.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing interest in professional development in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Gerlach, 2018), indicates the need for highly qualified language teachers and teacher education programs that can prepare and support practitioners effectively. This can prove to be a challenge, depending on the context, for the future teachers' professional and personal experiences (Giannikas, 2019), and the nature of assessment teacher education programs apply. Traditional measures of teachers' competence have been heavily criticized due to their lack of authenticity and predictive validity (Darling-Hammond, 2001). It has been argued in the literature that schools of education must design and redesign programs

that help student teachers understand and appreciate a wide array of things about learning, assessing, social and cultural contexts, all the while enacting all the above in complex classroom contexts, serving increasingly diverse students. This means that the enterprise of teacher education must venture out further and aim towards a transformation agenda in terms of the knowledge and skills that are needed in school contexts created to allow practitioners develop and use what they know (Fullan, 1993). Although assessment may vary according to the instructor, it is considered an important tool for the improvement of language learning and for the advancement of teacher education programs. An alternative approach in both contexts could add fundamental value. However, there is no insinuation that other types of outcome measures cannot be sensibly used as tools for evaluation. On the contrary, the author supports the notion that no single measure is an entirely adequate means of evaluating the effectiveness of individual teachers (see Cantrell & Kane, 2013). Nonetheless, in the case of teacher education, student teachers are in need of assessment approaches that can prepare them as well as assess them in their teaching practices. Performance assessment has emerged as a useful measure of teacher performance, but also as a method of direct evaluation of teaching ability (Pecheone & Chung, 2006). This form of assessment is valuable with respect to the role that it can play in motivating and guiding actions aimed at student teachers' improvement (Peck & McDonald, 2010). The present chapter will elaborate on the benefits of performance assessment in pre-service teacher training, and will present findings of a study which focuses on an English Language Didactics course of a Higher Education pre-service teacher training program for potential secondary state school ELT teachers of the Republic of Cyprus. The aim of the research is to investigate the trainees' progress, potential teaching ability and confidence via the means of their assessment.

BACKGROUND

Quality teaching and teacher effectiveness has risen to the top of the education policy agenda across the globe, as stakeholders and policy makers are now convinced that effective teaching is one of the most important school-related factors in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The teaching quality schools are in need of strong instruction that facilitates learning. Such teaching meets the demands of the discipline, the instructor's goals, and the students' needs (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Comparative analyses of student learning outcomes are often used to impose mechanisms on the teaching and teacher education, including standard setting, teacher testing and evaluation (Tatto, 2006). Huber and Skedsmo (2018) have argued that from the turn of the century, teacher assessment and evaluation have been debated as vital strategies for assuring and developing educational qualities. Assessing outcomes requires a definition of what is expected of potential teachers in means of skills, dispositions and means of measuring these skills (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000).

The issue of assessment has been highly debated in the field, where scholars have argued that of student test score data to evaluate practitioners does not help inform judgements about new entrants to the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2010). There is growing interest among teacher educators and evaluators in constructing other forms of assessment that efficiently portray the complexity of teaching and can provide valid data about competence and teaching abilities, while helping teachers improve their work (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). The use of teacher performance assessment allows more readiness for entry in the profession (Newton, 2010). In recent years, the creation of a performance assessment for evaluating student teachers has taken a hold. This type of assessment includes

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