Chapter XVI
Peer Assessment for Development of Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Peer assessment holds tremendous potential to positively impact the development of preservice teachers. The purpose of this chapter is to describe our findings on the impact of different forms of peer observation and feedback on preservice teachers' skills in analyzing classroom teaching and their perceptions of their experience with peer assessment. In addition to reporting our findings, we draw from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning literature to present peer assessment as a medium to overcome structured isolation that is present in the practice of teaching. According to our study, peer observation and feedback is beneficial to preservice teachers' learning. However, to maximize its effectiveness, a culture of peer assessment should be established in teacher education programs.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is often a solitary endeavor. The traditional model of a single teacher behind closed doors of a classroom, which Labaree (2000) calls structured isolation, remains the predominant reflection of teaching in the minds of most people, including educators. Preservice teachers often enter the field of teaching with this private model of education in mind. Teacher preparation, like teaching, also has a dominant model in which instructors teach and assess teacher candidates individually. Candidates also complete some sort of practicum and internship with classroom teachers who help in the preparation and assessment of candidates. These practica and student teaching experiences are typically structured where one teacher assesses and provides feedback to preservice teachers on an individual basis. Even when two or more preservice teachers are placed in a classroom for the same time period over the course of a semester, the lesson plans and teaching experiences are considered personal and feedback is provided privately to each candidate.

For the most part candidates are somewhat passive in reflecting upon and assessing their own teaching and the teaching of their peers. Thus, the dominant view of both teaching and teacher preparation has limitations both in imagined spaces as well as reality and holds implications for teacher education programs. However, in contrast to traditional expectations, the momentum of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has thrust teaching into the realm of an inquiry-oriented public space (Huber & Morreale, 2002; Huber & Hutchings, 2005). In this view, teaching is no longer isolated from what is traditionally known as scholarship.

SoTL provides a foundation for our work as scholar-educators whose main responsibilities include the education of preservice teachers. As such, we introduced our students to SoTL; teaching as an ongoing and scholarly process, utilizing inquiry to inform teaching/learning in a community-oriented way (Huber & Morreale, 2002; Huber & Hutchings, 2005). We assisted preservice teachers in establishing a sort of commons (a virtual or conceptual space for sharing ideas about and supporting teaching and learning) through peer observation and feedback support (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). We view peer observation and feedback as a vehicle for professional development through which preservice teachers assess both their peers and themselves. As part of our ongoing inquiry into peer observation and feedback, we analyzed preservice teachers' perceptions of participation in the experience and the extent to which participation strengthened their analytical abilities. We purport that participation in peer observation and feedback experiences helps preservice teachers develop a more inquiry based and community oriented approach to teaching and strengthen their analytical abilities and teaching efficacy. We believe these processes of inquiry-based teaching and learning and community development through a commons help to address the structured isolation noted above.

This chapter focuses on the implications of a longitudinal three-phase study in which peer observation and feedback was introduced to preservice teachers at different points in their teacher preparation. The study began with encouraging preservice teachers to become more observant of what their peers did in the classroom in phase one (Gilpin, 2007). From there, the study evolved to a more systematic integration of different degrees of peer observation and feedback in phases two and three. Phase two involved semi-structured peer observation, while phase three incorporated unstructured, semi-structured and structured peer observation and feedback. The purpose of this chapter is to delineate our findings, particularly from the third phase, and reflect on implications of the study overall. Throughout the chapter we use peer assessment, peer observation and feedback, and peer coaching interchangeably.

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