

Pre-Service Teachers' and Instructors' Reflections on Virtually Afforded Feedback During a Distant Teaching Practicum Experience

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is placed on the reflective process of inquiry of pre-service teachers and their instructor in Sweden during geographically distant placement in Tanzania and Kenya. A detailed examination of instructor's reflection on the provision of virtually-afforded feedback and pre-service teachers' reflections on their teaching feedback, the technologically-afforded recording media, and the teaching inquiry and knowledge generation is conducted. The data are explored qualitatively through the analysis of focus group interviews and an online questionnaire. A new insight is provided that extend beyond placement schools and raises the need for further longitudinal studies in Action Research with alternative technological media.

KEYWORDS

Action Research, African Contexts, Instructor's Reflection, iPads, Multimodality, Pre-Service Teachers' Reflections, Teaching Practicum, Virtually Afforded Feedback

INTRODUCTION

This Action Research study aims to delve into an instructor's reflections on the virtually-afforded feedback he provided to pre-service teachers enrolled in his Pre-Service Teacher Education course and placed in distant teaching practicum. It also explores the role of this feedback in instructor's professional development. Further, pre-service teachers' reflections of their teaching experiences and the way they are mediated by the use of technology (iPads) are explored qualitatively.

Action Research (AR) can play an important role in examining pre-service teachers' introduction to the epistemology of the teaching practice, and AR is an indispensable component of both instructors and pre-service teachers (Kitchen & Stevens, 2018).

Important pedagogical and professional benefits emerge from pre-service teachers' immersion in such study programmes. The reflective nature of action research invites teachers to "examine the dynamics of their classrooms, ponder the actions and interactions of students, validate and

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challenge existing practices, and take risks in the process” (Mills, 2011, p. 46). It also offers teachers a path to devise a strategic plan of action that is embedded in methodologically sound practices and epistemologies of practice that can guide instructors in responding to the challenges of their teaching environment and gain new valid knowledge. A respond to these challenges can often lead educators to enhance or change their practices. As Somekh and Zeichner (2009) note, “All educators who conduct action research are interested in improving their own practice. In addition, some of these are also interested in sharing their learning with others and/or in contribution to social reconstruction” (p. 10; see also Noffke, 1997).

Multiple studies (Ateşkan, 2016; Beneyto, Castillo, Collet-Sab, & Tort, 2018; Kitchen & Stevens, 2008; Lattimer, 2012; Messiou, 2018; Schulte, 2017; Ulvik, Riese, & Roness, 2018; Wyatt, 2011) have delved into the professional development and advancement, pedagogical practices, reflection and skill building of pre-service students and teachers immersed in Action Research, as well as the impact of such practices on the school and broader community. Studies have demonstrated the benefits of AR for pre-service teachers in several areas including their ‘transformation of practice’ education and their formulation of pedagogical approaches based in evidence (Brydon–Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire 2003; Lattimer, 2012). Reflection is a process, according to which pre-service teachers can constructively contemplate and monitor their process of thinking in order to improve their teaching practices. Student teachers’ reflections on their action (Volk, 2010) appears to be critical for teacher training. According to Leitch and Day (2000), after their immersion in teacher education programmes, pre-service teachers can become reflective practitioners that can evaluate their performance. Similarly, studies on students’ provision of feedback on the teachers’ instructional practice and performance have been widespread at tertiary education (see Denson, Loveday, & Johnson, 2010; Penny & Coe, 2004).

Further, using video in pre-service and in-service teacher education is a way that enables teachers’ ‘noticing’ (Sherin & van Es, 2005). In other words, pre-service teachers can explore the verbal and non-verbal aspects of their teaching and go back and forth for multiple viewing (Zhang, Lundberg, & Eberhardt, 2010). However, much of the research up to now has not dealt with: (i) pre-service teachers’ reflections on the instructor’s virtually-afforded feedback and their own teaching practicum experience, (ii) the impact of multimodality on pre-service teachers’ professional development, (iii) an experienced instructor’s perspectives on the development of constructive online feedback and, (iv) the impact of virtually-afforded feedback on the instructor’s professional development. Additionally, looking into data emerging from both the instructor’s involvement in virtually-afforded feedback and pre-service teachers’ self-reflection can elicit data complementary in nature that can enhance our understanding on the underlying mechanisms that drive participants’ actions during their practicum and provide invaluable resources for future steps in the field.

This study is exploratory and interpretative in nature and examines pre-service teachers’ reflection on the development of their teaching skills through their engagement in a geographically distant placement. At the same time, it examines the instructor’s reflection on the affordances of such study programmes to develop his expertise and professional practice in preparing future teachers in breaking in this epistemology of the teaching practice. The findings invite us to reconsider student-teacher placements within the broader ecology in which such practices emerge and examine the implications for pre-service teachers, and the instructor’s professional practice. Pedagogical and technological implications also arise in the instructor’s reflection and steps in similar future endeavours.

This paper includes three parts. The first part delves into the methodological procedures of the study; the second part introduces the results of the study and the third part places the results within a wider framework by discussing the implications and suggesting future actions.

The Context: Teacher Education in a Swedish Academic Institution and Teaching Practicum in Tanzania and Kenya

The study delved into the placement of pre-service teachers in two private primary schools in Tanzania, School A and School B, and one in Kenya, School C. School A was located in a small

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