



PSIWORLD 2013

The importance of developing a sense of self as a teacher during the training programmes

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Abstract

This paper discusses the role of the training in shaping teaching philosophies and practices in TE in Romania. Teaching beliefs and attitudes are considered central to effective teaching and learning behaviour, being closely linked to teachers' values, views of the world and conceptions of their place within it. It compares trainees' understanding of 'teaching' and 'being a teacher' throughout ITE and experienced teachers's beliefs and attitudes. It emphasizes the necessity of using reflective methods for teachers and trainees with diverse abilities, experiences and expectations who need to develop a sense of self as a teacher as early as ITE.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Romanian Society of Applied Experimental Psychology.

Keywords: initial teacher training; reflective processes; professional identity.

1. Introduction

The present study is part of a larger-scale research which looks at different methods used by teacher training programmes to promote continuous professional development. It is a case study which refers to relevant factors affecting the creation of a professional identity as a teacher. On the one hand, this paper offers insights into trainees' beliefs and perceptions about teaching before trainees start ITE. It also analyses the way courses are organised and delivered as it was hypothesised that the way courses responded to trainees' needs and expectations (in terms of

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content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and personal qualities) could influence the changes into trainees' perceptions and beliefs about teaching, could contribute to developing a sense of self as a teacher and could facilitate further learning. It is argued that through guided reflection they could bring their beliefs to a conscious level. Articulating and examining their perceptions might contribute to a better understanding of how they view teaching as well as the skills they needed to acquire to become competent teachers. On the other hand, for comparison reasons, it introduces data about beliefs and attitudes towards teaching and more important about what it means to be a teacher in Romania, expressed by experienced teachers that complete a course as part of their continuous education.

ITE in general provide a practicum experience, but it operates under the assumption that novice teachers will transfer what they learn in their courses into effective instructional practices once they enter the classroom (Johnson, 1996, cited in Tinker Sachs et al., 1996). Johnson (ibid.) argues that what novice teachers learn and how it is learned must be situated within contexts in which that knowledge is used and it must resemble the knowledge that is held by those who already participate in those contexts.

The present case study was placed in a Romanian university, which offers initial training to the students who wish to become teachers and specialised courses to experienced teachers who have already entered the profession. All participants to the study hold firm and diverse beliefs about the teaching profession, based on their own schooling experiences, long before they enter the classroom and they persist throughout their teacher preparation and into their early years of teaching. These are believed to prevent them from embracing completely the pedagogical practices that they will need to learn in order to become effective educators. The challenge for the training programme is to respond to the needs of these students who have a diverse background of abilities, experiences and expectations, which influence their mental picture of themselves as teachers and their teaching behaviour.

This case study started from the assumption that through guided reflection the both teachers and trainees could bring their beliefs to a conscious level. Articulating and examining their perceptions may contribute to a better understanding of how they view teaching as well as the skills they needed to acquire to become competent teachers.

Trainees should be encouraged to examine through critical reflection, how the instruction they are receiving embodies what they are learning about teaching (Freeman & Richards, 1996). Thus, teaching the pre-service teachers the capacity to be reflective at earlier points of their teacher development becomes an important issue for teacher training programmes (Pollard, 2002) and influences their ability to respond effectively to changes required by their continuous education. The concept of reflective learning, used here as a means for teacher professional development, is that employed by Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983), a tentative interpretation of given elements which comprises examination, exploration, introspection and analysis of all attainable consideration which will define and clarify the problem in hand (in Pollard, 2002). It refers to any process that encourages in general an attitude of ongoing exploration and enquiry, that encourages awareness of the factors affecting teacher trainees' learning, choices made about the organisation of activities in the classroom, and the use of techniques and materials etc.

This research approached the opportunities of reflection trainee students have during the course as it was considered that reflection outcomes can bring about changes into their perceptions and beliefs about teaching, as stated above. A starting point was the attempt to identify teaching beliefs and attitudes because it is assumed these are central to teaching behaviour. Teachers' beliefs about themselves, about learning and its educational relevance and about learners if consistent with their action are vitally important for effective teaching. Literature brings evidence to support the hypothesis that teachers are influenced by their beliefs which are closely linked to their values, their views of the world and to their conceptions of their place within it. Beliefs determine how individuals organise and define tasks and problems and can be predictors of how teachers behave in the classroom. They influence the way teachers plan their lessons, the kind of decisions they make and their general classroom practice. Teachers hold beliefs about their learners, about learning, about teaching and about themselves as individuals and professionals.

One's affect towards a particular thing, action, situation or experience represents the way that thing, that action, that situation or that experience fits in with one's needs or purposes, and its resulting effect on one's emotions, or affective variables such as motivation or attitude (Stevick, 1999, cited in Arnold, 1999; Young, 1999; Le Doux, 1996, cited in Young, 1999).

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