

Implementing on-campus microteaching to elicit preservice teachers' reflection on teaching actions: Fresh perspective on an established practice

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Abstract: This article calls for renewed emphasis on the use of on-campus microteaching to facilitate simultaneously preservice teachers' performance of effective teaching skills and their capability to reflect meaningfully on their emergent teaching actions. In making a case for greater focus on the implementation of microteaching in preservice teacher preparation, the authors: (a) acknowledged the pioneering role of field-based experiences as the context for the studies that identified different types and levels of teacher reflection, (b) pointed out the limitations of field-based experiences for inculcating reflective teaching practices in neophytes, (c) described the characteristics of on-campus microteaching as a powerful tool for helping preservice teachers develop the skills of effective and reflective teaching, and (d) delineated the unique elements of promising practices of using on-campus microteaching to promote effective and reflective teaching.

Keywords: reflectivity, reflective practices, microteaching, educational experiences, teaching strategies.

I. Introduction.

Preparing effective and reflective teachers is a recurring theme in teacher education. A few instructional practices suggested as effective approaches for developing reflective abilities in preservice teachers include Socratic dialogue, action research, case studies, and journaling (Valli, 1997; Spalding and Wilson, 2002). Underlying the use of these reflectivity-inducing approaches is the recognition that extensive experience with real-life students in the natural classroom is the critical element in facilitating preservice teachers' reflectivity on teaching (Guyton and Byrd, 2000; Willard-Holt and Bottomley, 2000). For this reason also, the teacher preparation curriculum emphasizes various levels of what Cruickshank (cited in Brent, Wheatley, and Thomson, 1996) called *concrete real experiences* in preparing novice teachers to teach. It is commonly acknowledged in the field that through direct supervised classroom experiences, preservice teachers "develop their reflective and analytical skills, examine the relationship between theory and practice, and correct misinterpretations they might have about teaching" (Feyten and Kaywell, 1994. p. 52).

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II. Field-Based Experience as a Context for Studying Reflectivity Patterns.

Field-based experiences facilitate the development of reflective practice, hence several of the studies that delineated the characteristics of the different types or levels of novice teachers' reflectivity on teaching actions centered on teaching experiences in natural classrooms (Collier, 1999; Williard-Holt and Bottomley, 2000). These studies however did not preclude the fact that these placements are often fraught with teaching practices and educational mandates that might be adverse to the nurturing of critical reflection on teaching. Although field-based teaching experiences as the nexus for integrating theory and practice, and providing opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on their teaching have been successful, these experiences according to Erdman (1983) have not always resulted in the attainment of these expectations. Erdman evoked Dewey's (1938/1998) differentiation of educative and miseducative experiences as follows:

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are miseducative. Any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. (p. 13)

This illustrates the paradoxical assessment of the importance of field-based experiences in teacher education. The typical field experience though perceived to be valuable, has the potential of perpetuating miseducative practices in the preservice teacher or educating the neophyte to comply unquestioningly with the status quo (Guyton and Byrd, 2000; Metcalf, Ronen Hammer, and Kahlich, 1996). Cruickshank et al. (1996) described a reflection-limiting effect of this compliant mindset also described as "impression management" on student teachers as follows:

While it [student teaching] has the necessary conditions to become a laboratory activity, it frequently is not, because student teachers are not truly viewed or treated as students of teaching involved in discovering, testing, reflecting, modifying, and so forth. Rather, too often student teaching is best characterized as learning to cook in someone else's kitchen, or modeling the "master". (pp. 29 – 30)

Preparing preservice teachers to teach effectively and to reflect on the sequence and consequences of their teaching actions is a prominent issue among teacher educators who must facilitate the integration of theory and practice through the proliferation of field-based experiences and the use of structured reflective thinking components such as journal writing and reflective interviews. It can be noted from the preceding that natural classrooms are not always the most accommodating settings for fostering novice teachers' reflection on their teaching actions. In order for reflectivity on teaching to succeed, it should be nurtured through microteaching in a supportive on-campus clinical setting (Pultorak, 1996). This is not to suggest that on-campus microteaching supplant field-based experiences as the vehicle for ensuring preservice teachers' development of reflective teaching. Rather, the purpose of this article is to assert that preservice teachers' reflectivity on teaching is a developmental process (Pultorak, 1996) that should be nurtured first, in a supportive on-campus clinical setting in anticipation of continuing implementation in off-campus field-based placements, and eventually throughout the span of a teaching career.

III. On-Campus Microteaching.

Microteaching was designed to provide a supportive environment for preservice teachers to practice teaching skills. Developed in the early 1960s at Stanford University, microteaching has evolved as the on-campus clinical experience method in “91% of teacher education programs” (Cruickshank et al. 1996, p. 105). At its inception, the goal of microteaching was simply to teach preservice teachers to emulate discrete skills modeled by instructors. The emphasis was on repetitive practice aimed at helping the neophyte attain eventual proficiency in executing several acquired latent skills simultaneously. The use of microteaching has currently shifted from the previous limited focus to encompass giving preservice teachers an all-inclusive teaching experience. Teaching whole lessons, albeit in a scaled-down form, has necessitated preservice teachers’ analysis of their teaching actions.

Two associated components critical in the implementation of microteaching are: videotaped microlessons, and feedback (Benton-Kupper, 2001; Butler, 2001). Working alone with an instructor or with peers in a microteaching group, a preservice teacher views the videotape of a mini-lesson for the purpose of analyzing and reflecting on the lesson as taught. Individual viewing of the videotaped lesson for the purpose of writing a critique of instructional performance is a practice aimed at encouraging the development of self-analysis and consequently, reflective practices. The other common element in microteaching is the provision of feedback either orally and/or in written forms. Led by an instructor or a trained supervisor, peers discuss each microteaching presentation, pointing out strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. Oral feedback is followed by written feedback on a microteaching review or feedback form developed for the purpose (Benton-Kupper, 2001; Butler, 2001). These characteristics of microteaching enhance the development of effective teaching skills and reflection on these emergent skills. Hence reflection on teaching actions has become closely associated with microteaching.

The merits of microteaching as a teaching strategy in teacher education can be described from three main viewpoints. First, there are the dual benefits for helping novice teachers practice teaching skills and reflect on their teaching actions. Second, there are studies that vindicate the practice by using microteaching to counter or reassess the effectiveness of other teacher education practice, and thirdly, are studies that compare the effectiveness of one variation of microteaching with another. The focus of the first category of studies was on the description of the organizational structure for effectively implementing microteaching activities. These studies often concluded with an affirmation of the benefits of the experience from preservice teachers’ perspectives (Brent, Wheatley, and Thomson, 1996; Benton-Kupper, 2001). An illustrative example of the descriptive emphasis is Butler’s (2001) examination of the change in preservice teachers’ thinking about effective teaching following two microteaching experiences. Butler (2001) reported that “participants were eager to talk about their microteaching opportunities and to comment on how beneficial the experience was and how much they had learned” (p. 266).

The second category of studies compared the effectiveness of microteaching with other teacher education instructional practices. Metcalf (1993) examined how a Teacher Education Laboratory designed to supplement portions of a field-based experience program with a 15-week sequence of integrated on-campus laboratory experiences affected preservice teachers’ behavior and understanding. Preservice teachers participated in several laboratory experiences including videotaped peer teaching and reflective teaching. The conclusion of this exploratory study was that the participants (28 preservice teachers) found both reflective teaching and microteaching to

be helpful experiences for acquiring and practicing professional skills. In a study that compared one microteaching practice with another, Kpanga (2001) examined the effect of videotaping of proceedings on preservice teaching performance in a teacher education setting and found that the experimental group that used the video recordings to guide discussion and critical analysis of microteaching showed significant improvement over the control group that did not use video recordings. The preceding studies validated the versatility of microteaching as a strategic process for helping preservice teachers attain the skills for teaching effectively and for performing critical analysis on their teaching.

IV. On-Campus Microteaching as a Tool for Reflection.

Considering that microteaching has the attributes to accommodate the development and enhancement of effective and reflective teachers, a paradigm shift in the discourse and practice of on-campus microteaching is imperative. Such a shift must examine patterns of reflectivity that preservice teachers display as they sequence and consider the consequences of their teaching. Though most of the descriptors of the various types and levels of novice teachers' reflectivity on teaching actions were derived from off-campus observation of full-blown lessons, it behooves teacher educators to be mindful of the benefits of on-campus microteaching for examining preservice teachers' reflectivity. While these descriptors have guided our thinking about the nuances of novice teachers' introspection on their teaching behaviors for a great while, the time has come for teacher educators to develop new and particular insights into preservice teachers' reflections on teaching actions in the unique context of on-campus microteaching. Unique in the sense that a) preservice teachers teach microlessons to their peers in a simulated environment, b) they receive prompt feedback from a university instructor and their peer-students, and c) through the use of video recording, they have the opportunity to watch their teaching performance privately or publicly with others. These instant and almost-instant feedback opportunities furnish preservice teachers meaningful content for reflection on their microteaching. The obvious question then is: What are some of the peculiar accoutrements that characterize preservice teachers' reflection on their teaching actions in on-campus microteaching experiences?

Author (2005) addressed this question in an interpretive analysis of the reflective outputs of 31 secondary education preservice teachers following the second session of two microteaching opportunities. The microteaching activities replicated the characteristics of the experience described above, namely scaled-down mini-lessons taught to small groups of peers in university classrooms, the use of videotape to record lesson presentations, and peer feedback written on a prepared form and communicated orally. At the end of the second microteaching experience, participants submitted a one to two page self-reflection based on personal perceptions of instructional performance, written feedback from peers, and information from video recording of the microlesson. Post-microteaching reflection was guided by three self-analysis queries: (a) What did I intend to do in this lesson? (b) What did I do? and (c) What would I do differently if I were to re-teach the lesson?

Articulating these queries within a framework of the sequential stages of reflectivity, i.e. describe, inform, confront, and reconstruct (Smyth, 1989), Author interpreted the recurring themes in participating preservice teachers' reflections on their micro lessons as follows:

1. Describe ... what did I intend to do in this lesson?
2. Inform ... what did I do?

3. Confront and Reconstruct ... what would I do differently if I were to teach the lesson again?

The recurring themes that emerged relative to the first two components of the framework showed that large numbers of participating preservice teachers attained describing and informing stages of reflectivity on their teaching actions with varying degrees of sophistication. However, with respect to confronting the consequences of their teaching actions and articulating specific accurate alternative actions for improving teaching performance, participants' reflective responses for the most part were unsatisfactory. For example, only 13 out of the 31 participating preservice teachers advanced to the expected affirmative and self-critique confronting stage that was a prerequisite for producing explicit reconstructing reflectivity on their lessons. The following representative statements are prototypes of the desired describing, informing, and confronting and reconstructing reflectivity respectively:

- "I think the major goal I had for this lesson was to make sure each student understood how to solve a punnett square (b). Since I didn't have one biology major in the class, I knew it would be a successful lesson if each student could solve a punnett square on their own(c)... I wanted to go over some key definitions that would lay the foundations for the task analysis. With regards to the definitions, I wanted to make sure that they were easy to understand (d). I wanted the steps in the task analysis to be easy to understand (a). I wanted to make sure I got every student involved... I also wanted to make a point to check for understanding. Lastly, I wanted to have a brilliant closing that would leave an impression on each of them."
- "I started off the class by saying it was time for class to start.... I pointed to the warm up and read it to the class. They had to define totalitarianism.... I asked the students what they came up with for totalitarianism. At first, no one said anything. Then, one person said that it was something to do with government. Someone else said it was a dictatorship. Since no one else had anything else to say, I gave the actual definition....I went over each of the three critical attributes, explaining each one to the students.... I went over three examples and three nonexamples, explaining why each one fulfilled or did not fulfill the three critical attributes of totalitarianism.... Then I gave four more examples, having the students determine if they were examples or nonexamples of totalitarianism. After this, I asked the students if they had additional examples of totalitarianism. Two students came up with examples.... Then, I gave the closure...."
- "If I could change the way I taught this lesson, I would bring with me some examples of inventions, either pictures or the actual invention itself. This is an idea that I received from the feedback sheets and I think it is a good one. I also experienced a little confusion about what a patent is. I needed to teach them the definition first instead of assuming that they knew what I was talking about when I made reference to the U.S. Patent Office.... At the end of the lesson I could have asked the students to help me sum up the main attributes of an invention to wrap up the lesson."

It was evident from the results of the study that merely providing opportunities for preservice teachers to participate in on-campus microteaching opportunities in a supportive, non-graded environment, and giving them specific prompts to elicit reflection did not always guarantee the expected outcome of deep introspection on teaching actions. Subsequently, it is equally important to mention that inquiry into the themes that defined the types and levels of participants' reflections was instructive in revealing the prevailing problems of their reluctance or inability to hold up their teaching to reflective scrutiny. The perpetuation of pedantic reflections on on-campus microteaching would consign the experience to a trivial exercise that is of no significant benefit to the developmental process of preparing effective reflective teachers. This is the reason why naming the types and categories that define preservice teachers' reflections on teaching is critical in the reconceptualization of on-campus microteaching as a tool for empowering preservice teachers to remake and self-correct their teaching actions. Post-microteaching reflection--a ubiquitous element of the experience--would therefore be educative to both preservice teachers and teacher educators.

The opportunity to reframe their implementation of emergent teaching skills, develop, and improve on a repertoire of teaching actions that work, gives neophytes control over their microteaching experience and thus enhances the value of the experiences. Through constant scrutiny of the typology of preservice teachers' reflections on their nascent teaching skills, teacher educators will be able to identify shortcomings in the development of effective and reflective teaching skills. Thus, on-campus microteaching coupled with critical analysis of preservice teachers' reflections on their teaching are imperative in attaining the important goal of preparing effective and reflective teachers.

V. Conclusion.

Teacher education programs seek to prepare effective and reflective teachers. Students who come through the programs have knowledge of teaching by vicarious means, having observed teachers for at least fourteen years and or 3,060 days (Kennedy, 1991). The acknowledgement of the interplay of prior knowledge and experience on acquired knowledge prompted Korthagen and Kessels (1999) to redirect teacher educators to deliberately combine the teaching of *episteme*, "knowledge that is based on research and ... characterized as ... theory with a big T" with *phronesis*, knowledge that is more "perceptual than conceptual" – "theory with a small t" (p. 7). This suggestion presupposes that the dissemination of the knowledge of effective teaching skills to preservice teachers cannot become successfully internalized without teacher educators' attentiveness to the preconceptions that the new teachers have about teaching. Providing deliberate and structured opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on the sequence and consequences of their emergent teaching actions is one strategy for uncovering and correcting erroneous preconceptions that might interfere with the execution of best practices in teaching. As alluded to earlier, such opportunities may not be realized in field-based experiences including student teaching. On-campus microteaching with its practice of scaled-down teaching, feedback and self-analysis, offers a unique context for grounding preservice teachers in the development of effective and reflective teaching. These characteristic attributes of microteaching appear to have been elusive for teacher educators because the emphases in microteaching seem skewed toward providing an opportunity for preservice teachers to practice teaching skills. Though reflection is an acknowledged element of the experience, preservice teachers' reflections on their teaching actions have largely been unexamined. Granted that preservice teachers will

reflect on their teaching when prompted, it is incumbent on teacher educators to examine the reflections generated from microteaching actions in order to discover recurring streams and patterns of reflection that would promote the development of best practice in teaching. Teaching teachers to use effective teaching skills and to reflect in a productive manner on their demonstrated teaching actions must proceed, metaphorically speaking, as two sides of the same coin.

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