Research Article

Enhancing Preservice Teachers' Professionalism through Daily Teaching Reflections

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This study assessed the hypothesis that preservice teachers who were required to assemble a portfolio assessment would report greater scores on professionalism as measured by The Student Teaching Reflection Survey (STRS) (Robichaux, 2001) than preservice teachers who were not required to assemble a portfolio assessment. Results from a sample of 510 preservice teachers (232 nonportfolios and 278 portfolios) supported the hypothesis. Assembling a professional portfolio appears to develop more reflective practitioners, which in turn leads to the development of a more effective educator capable of handling the complexities of the teaching profession.

1. Introduction

Teaching is a complex endeavor because the pedagogy is age dependent. Teachers must create an environment conducive to learning which involves a delicate balance between appropriate questioning against comprehensible content-specific explanations. Purposeful decisions are constantly generated for every lesson to be successful. This is no easy task for veteran educators, let alone preservice teachers taking full responsibility for a classroom for the very first time. Student teaching can be quite demanding and stressful for not only the preservice teacher, but for the supervising teacher as well as she/he observes the daily struggles of the preservice teacher. To assist preservice teachers in their own professional growth, it seems imperative that preservice teachers use daily reflection. According to Groce et al. [1], the development of the ability to reflect on one's teaching is one of the underpinnings of the teaching profession. By consciously reflecting on their teaching practices and the resulting student behaviors, preservice teachers can "construct their own learning through an interaction among their beliefs, their prior knowledge, and their experiences" [2]. Because of this learning experience, preservice teachers become more responsive to changing their behaviors based on the needs

of the classroom [3]. As Costa and Kallick [4] assert, "the ultimate purpose of reflection is to get us into the habit of thinking about our experience." Through reflective thought, preservice teachers learn what best practices are for their current students and become more effective.

Although it has been widely documented that reflection is an effective tool for improving teaching practices [5], teacher educators do not always explicitly instruct preservice teachers how to reflect effectively *t* on their teaching. Instead, preservice teachers are often expected to engage in self-reflection even if they have never been provided with the opportunity to learn these skills [6]. Furthermore, "definitions that reveal differing theoretical orientations about reflection have resulted in confusion about its meaning and uses" (Mackintosh, as cited in [7]). According to Loughran [8], some educators consider reflection to simply be "thinking about something, whereas for others, it is a well-defined and crafted practice that carries very specific meaning and associated action."

Previous research reports that preservice teachers tend to write on classroom-management problems, students' social interactions; and the social dimension of learning [9, 10]. Beginning preservice teachers seem to subscribe to the belief

that if they have no classroom management dilemmas, then they are effective teachers. They often fail to provide sufficient attention to the content of their lessons as an indicator of their effectiveness. However, requiring preservice teachers to assemble a portfolio assessment has been documented by the research literature that the reflections include a focus on both the content and the methods to teach the content [11]. Additionally, as preservice teachers gain experience, classroom management issues become less of a concern and curriculum, lesson content and context, and pedagogy become more significant when reflecting on their teaching [12]. In general, “reflection continually emerges as a suggested way of helping practitioners better understand what they know and do as they develop their knowledge of practice through reconsidering what they learn in practice” [8].

Albeit several studies have examined reflection and reflective teaching in teacher education, the overwhelming majority of these studies have been qualitative in design, focusing on a small number of cases. Furthermore, there is a paucity of research comparing the reflective practices of preservice teachers with regards to professional growth. The hypothesis for this study was that preservice teachers who were required to assemble a portfolio assessment would report greater scores on professionalism than preservice teacher who were not required to assemble a portfolio assessment.

2. Method

2.1. Sample. Participants were 510 preservice teachers. Inclusion criteria were participants had completed 180 hour of actual teaching and had a minimum of 270 hours of observations, conferencing, participating in grading, writing assessments, and researching future lesson topics during their student teaching semester. Of the 510 participants, 232 completed their student teaching during the first year of this study prior to the implementation of a portfolio assessment system, which required daily teaching reflections. Thus, these participants were not required to submit an exit portfolio at the conclusion of their degree programs. The remaining 278 participants completed their student teaching experience during the second year of this study and were required to submit a professional portfolio, which contained daily teaching reflections, as a requirement for graduation. All participants successfully completed the student teaching semester and thus, completed the degree requirements for their major in education. Eighty seven percent were female while 13% were male. Slightly over 90% labeled themselves as Caucasian with the remaining 10% classified themselves as either African American, Asian or “Other”.

2.2. Procedure. Throughout four consecutive semesters, participants in this study completed the Student Teaching Reflection Survey (STRS) [13] on the last day of their student teaching experience. The STRS is a twelve-item questionnaire assessing three goals of reflection: improvement, performance, and professionalism, scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale. Specifically, the Professionalism domain evaluated

TABLE 1: Group differences on professionalism.

Portfolio		Nonportfolio	
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
3.53	.51	3.30	.72

the extent to which preservice teachers used daily reflections as a tool for professional growth.

3. Results

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to assess differences between the two groups on professionalism. Because the equal variance assumption was violated as indicated by a significant Levene’s test, a Behrens-Fisher correction was calculated. The portfolio group scored statistically significantly greater than the nonportfolio group, $t(23.55) = 3.96, P < .001$. See Table 1 for means and standard deviations.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the hypothesis that requiring preservice teachers to assemble a portfolio assessment would promote greater professionalism than preservice teachers who were not required to assemble a portfolio assessment. The hypothesis was supported in this study. The portfolio group scored statistically significantly higher on Professionalism than the nonportfolio group. This difference validated an objective of completing a “professional” portfolio. Thus, the portfolio group appears to be more reflective which is in agreement with previous research that claimed, “Portfolio assessment is valuable for promoting reflective practice in preservice teachers” [11].

The results of this study seem to indicate that even if preservice teachers are not formally trained on how to reflect upon their teaching and are not given reflection prompts, they still appear to reflect on issues that are important to becoming effective educators. They also appear to learn to value reflection as a tool for professional growth. By requiring preservice teachers to reflect daily on their teaching, it seems that these preservice teachers get in the habit of reflecting. By getting into this reflective habit, these preservice teachers are developing habits of professional growth and improvement [4]. Furthermore, the authors suggest that teacher educators provide their preservice teachers with training on how to most effectively reflect on their teaching so that the benefits of reflection are maximized. Teacher educators should provide preservice teachers with focused reflective prompts that guide them away from “teacher-centered concerns” towards “student-centered concerns.” Ultimately, preservice teachers should center their reflections on concerns regarding student growth in understanding and academic achievement, rather than on teacher-centered concerns; that is, being uncomfortable because of not knowing the answer to a student question or the time it takes to prepare meaningful standards-based, conceptually driven lessons. Assembling a professional

portfolio appears to develop a more reflective practitioner, which in turn leads to the development of a more effective educator capable of handling the complexities of the teaching profession.

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