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Title of research:

A Study of the School Experience Programme with reference to the Development of Teaching Proficiency and Reflective Thinking in Student Teachers

ABSTRACT

If teaching aspires to uplift itself from Etzioni's (1969) *semi profession status* and reach the position of an esteemed profession then it must ensure that the entry requirement is functional competence based upon a rigorous preparatory phase and a drive towards ongoing professional development. As per the demands of a profession, the practicum component of the teacher preparation programmes includes the school experience programme (SEP). This mixed method research explored the SEP of secondary teacher preparation programmes of two Universities in the National Capital Region of Delhi. The research questions that guided the direction of this study were:

- To what extent does SEP influence student teachers' teaching proficiency and reflective thinking?
- Whether the exposure to self learning material combined with the continuous supervision and feedback of the supervisor can enhance the level of reflective thinking amongst the student teachers?

This work was done in a phased manner where the first step was to study the inputs for SEP with reference to the development of teaching proficiency and reflective thinking and to understand the perception of student teachers about the role of SEP for enhancement of their teaching proficiency. In order to assess the effectiveness of SEP in terms of teaching proficiency, the student teachers were observed while they taught at the commencement of SEP and at the end of SEP. In order to assess the effectiveness of SEP in terms of reflective thinking of the student teachers, reflective journals of ten randomly selected students from the three institutes were procured for content analysis. Diary entries written at the commencement of the SEP for 4 consecutive days and at the end of SEP for the last 4 consecutive days was considered for this. In the second Phase, an intervention to enhance reflective thinking of student teachers was provided. The complete intervention was given to a small sample of 9 student teachers who were placed in the same school for SEP that the researcher was assigned to supervise during SEP as a teacher educator. Their reflective journals were procured after the end of SEP for content analysis. Further, the difference in reflective thinking evident in the writing of student teachers exposed to an intervention to enhance reflection as compared to a control group was determined.

The main findings are summarized below:

- The student teachers were given certain preparatory inputs before they proceeded for SEP. However, these inputs were not organized as a holistic preparatory programme.
- The student teachers valued SEP. They felt that SEP had been a positive experience and they *become a teacher* through this process.

- Teaching proficiency of the group of student teachers at the commencement of SEP was 48.05 and the standard deviation in the group was 14.93 on the other hand, teaching proficiency of the group of student teachers at the end of SEP was 64.64 and the standard deviation in the group was 15.94.
- There was a significant enhancement of teaching proficiency as a result of SEP as the calculated value of t (45.68) was more than the table value of t (2.61) at 0.01 level of significance at d_f 149.
- The results showed that most of the writing in the reflective journals at the commencement (98.75%) and end (97.63%) of SEP was descriptive in nature and not reflective. There was no impact of SEP on the reflective writing of the student teachers as the calculated value of t (-1.19) was less than the table value of t (3.25) at 0.01 level of significance at d_f 9.
- The reflective journals of both the intervention and the control groups were analyzed and about 63% of writing in the journals of the intervention group was found to be descriptive and not reflective, the remaining 37% was reflective. In the control group, the non-reflective component of the writing was a staggering 91% while only 9% was reflective.
- There was an enhancement of the level of reflective thinking (as evident in the reflective diaries) in the intervention group as the calculated value of χ^2 (24.81) was more than the table value (11.35) at 0.01 level of significance at d_f 3.

To conclude, it was found that SEP influenced student teachers' teaching proficiency but had no impact on reflective thinking. On the other hand, though the student teachers were expected to maintain reflective diaries/ journals of their practice in school, they were not exposed to the theoretical underpinnings of the concept, its significance, samples of reflective writings and different types of reflection, nor did they undertake any hands on activity to develop and understand reflection and hence there was no difference in the reflections written at the commencement and end of SEP. Most of the reflection penned by the student teachers was found to be of the category of 'descriptive writing'. Thus, the student teachers' diaries contained mostly descriptions (non reflective writing) and the lack of inputs in this aspect SEP was evident. The exposure to self learning material combined with the continuous supervision and feedback of the supervisor enhanced the level of reflective thinking amongst the student teachers. All student teachers of the intervention group demonstrated the capacity to reflect. This occurred by first preparing them to reflect. Then, they were constantly motivated and provided feedback to initiate higher levels of reflection. Thus, within the same short timeframe of the existing SEP, it was possible to enhance reflection in student teachers by constantly reiterating the vision of a teacher as a 'reflective practitioner'. The implications of the study lie in understanding the potential of SEP and evolving ways to strengthening it.

Reference:

Etzioni, A. (Eds.). (1969). *The semi-professions and their organizations: Teachers, nurses and social workers*. New York: Free Press.