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THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: REFLECTIONS OF A TEACHER EDUCATOR

Abstract:

This paper sheds light on the personal practices, experiences and research of a teacher educator, and asks the question whether a teacher educator's inquiries might lead to a better understanding of the complexities of teaching and learning- both for the teacher educator and his/ her student teachers. The author, who has been a teacher educator for the past 25 years, reflect on his own research in pre-service teacher education, and what he and his students have learned from the joint interventions they engaged in. The three interventions reflected upon in this paper, were conceptualized to provide possible solutions to three of the perennial issues that plague teacher education, namely (a) the problem of the apprenticeship of observation; (b) the problem of enactment; and (c) the problem of complexity. Although the research is contextualized in South Africa, literature shows that these are issues of international concern. Using a qualitative research design, the author explores realistic examples of learning from practice for practice, and learning in practice, that he has implemented and researched, as possible solutions to these problems. The findings of three qualitative research studies are examined, and its affordances to enhance the professional development of student teachers is discussed. The theoretical framework is scaffolding student teachers' professional development across the zone of proximal teacher development- Warford's take on the well-known Vygotskyan concept. The first set of research data deals with case-based teaching in pre-service teacher education. Case-based teaching provokes engaged learning, and provides student teachers with a better understanding of the complexities of the teaching profession. The second set of research data explores the affordances of a technique called prolepsis. Prolepsis refers to an approach where a teacher educator structures a learning opportunity in a way that assumes that the student teachers know more than they actually do. In this case, undergraduate student teachers were expected to teach biology to school learners on Saturdays for an entire year, and to take responsibility for meeting all the requirements set by the Department of Education. The third set of research data refers to a first year excursion for student teachers that the author initialized, and insights that emerged over 10 years of presenting the excursion curriculum. During the four-day excursion, student teachers engage in learning tasks as *Homo ludens* (the playing human). In this paper the excursion is viewed from a neo-Vygotskian perspective of activity theory.

Keywords:

Pre-service teacher education; engaging pedagogies; case-based teaching; prolepsis; zone of proximal teacher development; excursions; teacher professional development.

JEL Classification: I29, I21