

Experience related to teaching practice and participation in the induction year: The view through the blogs

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Summary

Introduction

Teacher education includes both, the initial training of the teachers, as well as the subsequent induction year and in-service training. Both of these stages are quite similar in teacher education and teacher's professional development – practice is a part of the initial teacher education and the induction year is the second stage of teacher education.

Teaching, teacher role, classroom management and students' behaviour in teaching practice have been the most frequent topics in previous studies (e.g. Fisher & Kim, 2013; Ozdemir & Yildirim, 2012; Rettig, 2013). Classroom management is an important topic that causes problems in the induction year (Eisenschmidt, 2006b; Haggarty et al., 2011). Secondly, a number of studies have highlighted the topic of pupils both in practice (e.g. Rettig, 2013) and the induction year (Eisenschmidt, 2006b; Haggarty et al., 2011). The third group of topics, concerns and negative experiences were related to supervision of practice (e.g. Ozdemir & Yildirim, 2012).

Several topics were represented by both poles – concerns as well as positive experiences. For example, supervision or mentor's work as concern (e.g. Ozdemir & Yildirim, 2012) and satisfaction (e.g. Eisenschmidt, 2006c); topics of teacher work as concern (e.g. Rettig, 2013) and pleasure because of increased knowledge and skills (e.g. Poom-Valickis, 2014). Classroom management and coping with difficult students were the topics where only concerns were underlined (Eisenschmidt, 2006c; Haggarty et al., 2011; Rettig, 2013).

Several models are used to describe a teacher's professional development. One of them is classical, so called models of concerns. Later researchers have supplemented first, Fullers' three stage model in several ways – for example, making the four-stage model (Fuller & Bown, 1975).

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In this paper we have taken Fuller and Bown's model as a basis to analyse teacher's professional development.

The aim of this study is to identify what and how student teachers (ST) and newly qualified teachers (NQT) write in blogs during teaching practice and their induction year. The research questions are as follows:

- What are the topics that ST and NQT write about in their blogs during their teaching practice and the induction year? How did it change during different periods of the induction year and teaching practice?
- How much ST and NQT wrote about success and failure during their teaching practice and the induction year? How did it change during different periods of the induction year and teaching practice, and how was it related to the issue of posts?
- How teacher's professional development was reflected in posts written by ST and NQT? How did it change during different periods of the induction year and teaching practice, and how was it related to the issue of posts?

The survey among NQT and ST was carried out during the academic years of 2010/11 and 2012/13. The sample of the study consisted of 243 participants who wrote at least two posts in the collective blog, (30 of such collective blogs were created in blogspot.com environment). 132 of the sample were student teachers and 111 were NQT. The data was gathered from 1900 blog posts which were divided into 3001 segments (unit of the analysis consisting of one topic or idea and which is comprehensible by itself). The researchers from the research team encoded the blog posts independently, and in the case of a discrepancy it was discussed until agreement was reached. The Chi-square test, Wilcoxon test and Mann-Whitney U-test were used for data analysis.

Results and discussion

Teaching, management of practice, and students were the three prevailing topics in the ST's blogs. These three topics dominated in all periods of practice. This result is in line with previous studies (e.g. Rettig, 2013). In the case of NQT posts teaching prevailed in all periods, but the importance of other topics increased and decreased depending on the period. One of the reasons for that may be the fact that the duration of the induction year (almost all academic year) is longer than the duration of practice (7–12 weeks) and, therefore, different issues might dominate in different periods.

There were four statistically significant differences in the proportion of topics of posts between those two groups (ST' and NQT'): blog, parents, colleagues and management of practice/induction year. All of these topics were proportionally larger in NQT' blogs. Surprisingly few topics addressed learning. It was an interesting result, because both teaching practice and the induction year are the stages of the teacher education and learning that are important in these stages. Also, the previous studies (e.g. Fisher & Kim, 2013) have claimed that reflecting on one's own posts helps to make learning more visible to them and ST also discuss the concord of theory and practice. However, our results did not support this. Maybe mentors should guide ST and NQT to discussions about learning from experiences.

ST posted more about their success compared to the NQT, but in both groups topics with neutral content prevailed. While in the case of ST the proportion of the posts about success was larger than the posts about problems in all periods, it was the same only in the first and last periods in the case of NQT. Merrill (2006) also claims that NQT need a possibility to share concerns and maybe the blog environment is one of the possibilities to do that. It may also refer to the fact that the ST have more support, compared to the NQT.

ST wrote about blogs, learning, teaching, management of practice and colleagues as successful experiences more than as problematic experiences. NQT wrote about the management of practice more as successful experiences, but about students more as problematic experiences. The previous studies (e.g. Eisenschmidt, 2006b; Haggarty et al., 2011) have also pointed out that the behaviour of students is one of the problematic issues in the case of NQT.

Appearance of the teachers' professional development in posts was analysed, using Fuller and Bown's (1975) model of concerns. All of the four stages (pre-teaching concerns, survival, teaching, and students) appeared in the posts of both groups, despite Fuller and Bown (1975) claim that the first stage is more common in the case of the ST. The first stage disappeared in the posts of NQT after the third period. The most prevalent stage in the posts of both groups was the survival stage which was quite an expected result, because the worries of how I manage with the class is one of the most burning topics during the teaching practice (e.g. Fisher & Kim, 2013; Ozdemir & Yildirim, 2012; Rettig, 2013) and during the induction year (Eisenschmidt, 2006c). It was quite interesting that the proportion of the survival stage was larger in NQT' blogs compared to the ST blogs. It might be that ST who have more support from supervisors of universities and

practice schools, do not realise all the demands of the teachers' work. NQT have to bear responsibilities of educating students.

Being aware of the experiences and concerns of ST and NQT might give an important input to teacher education – it gives the possibility to organise teaching practice and the induction year and to support ST and NQT. It is important that novice teachers do not confront only with concerns, but sustain also success and satisfaction. The results of our study might be used for that input.

Keywords: teaching practice, induction year, blog, professional development of teachers