

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF NOVICE EDUCATORS THROUGH CRITICAL REFLECTION

AN INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) inspired the development of GSTEP. This program provides a context for many novice educators to learn new teaching skills and pedagogical theory, examine personal assumptions about teaching, and critically reflect about teaching experiences. The program also establishes a community of diverse learners who are genuinely interested in teaching and supporting their peers. In this community, participants use the Wenger-Trayner social learning model (2015). A central component of GSTEP is critical reflection, influenced by the work of scholars such as Mezirow (2000) and Brookfield (2015). Many of the GSTEP experiences embed critical reflection as part of the assignment.

GSTEP has two major goals: (1) developing competency with teaching skills and (2) increasing self-efficacy related to teaching. Participants engage in peer seminars, explore pedagogical literature, prepare and implement a microteaching lesson reviewed by their peers, and teach in a class in their discipline. They explore their own assumptions about teaching through critical reflection. The overall experience assists them to engage learners, design active learning lessons based on achievable outcomes, facilitate student interaction, and link new learning to knowledge and experiences relevant to students' lives. Self-efficacy development in GSTEP, based upon the work of Bandura (1977), includes working with mentors and faculty to gain competency, engaging in modeling experiences, receiving encouragement and coaching, and gaining support with their emotional responses to teaching.

Opportunities to experience disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000) are part of the GSTEP program and critical reflection process. From the beginning, program mentors guide participants to discover and recognize the influence of their teaching assumptions. In classrooms, they experience student learning experiences very different from their own and explore the effectiveness of multiple teaching strategies. They learn about students with varying needs and experiences. Throughout the program, individuals complete critical incident questionnaires (CIQ) (Brookfield, 2015) and critical reflection essays that document the transformative learning process. They leave the program with comments such as: "Teaching is harder than I thought it would be."

An analysis of 68 critical reflection essays from GSTEP participants revealed evidence of premise reflections that included a shift in perspective, new understandings, or a change in assumptions (Kember, 1999). Students discovered that: teaching was not the same as learning, they had assumptions, great teaching does not just happen, teaching is an art, and teaching should constantly be evolving. One student reflected,

The most significant thing I learned in GSTEP was that I had fallen prey to the general perception that a learning environment involved a unidirectional flow of material from the educator to the student. I discovered that my most memorable educational experiences were situations that involved instructor engagement and unfettered interaction between and amongst the instructor and the students.

SELECT REFERENCES

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