

REFLECTIVE TEACHING: WHAT INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT REFLECTION CAN INFORM US ABOUT TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As an integral part of teaching and learning in higher education, Instructional Assistants (IAs) need to be prepared to meet the learning needs of a diverse student population. Universities have responded to this need in diverse ways, relying on the body of research focusing on standards of teacher proficiency by practice and instruction (Lambert & Tice, 1993). Past research has not focused specifically on IA perspectives in the context of a campus-provided professional development. This pilot study addresses this gap in literature by examining the views of IAs participating in a professional development course where they engaged in discussions surrounding andragogy, active teaching and learning, and lesson design. Participants took this course concurrent with their teaching duties and had the opportunity to learn through consistent practice and reflection-on-action, a method by which most professionals learn (Schön, 1983).

This session details the action research case studies of three IAs, who engaged in multiple levels of reflection during the “survival skills” course. Data sources consisted of ethnographic field notes taken by three Graduate Student Researchers (GSR); the first one served as a complete observer, the second served as a participant observer for the first session then complete observer for the rest of the course, and the third served as a participant observer for the first session then complete participant for the rest of the course. Notes were taken during eight, one-hour professional development sessions. The second GSR conducted one semi-structured interview with each of the three participants at the end of the course. Artifacts including results from a small group perception during week five, as well as reflection notes collected at the end of each session were also examined.

The professional development instructor prompted consistent reflection to foster reasoning and reconstruction, which are considered levels where transformation occurs (Bain et al., 2002). Exchanging ideas and experiences with others is fundamental to improving reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Thus, allowing for a structured space for first-time IAs to collaboratively reflect over the set period cultivated autonomous transformative reflection and peer-to-peer reflection prompting. Through a review of participant dialogue, researcher interest into their process of transformation emerged: professional development and consistent reflection helped develop participant self-efficacy as teachers (Yost, 2006). However, this came with a bilateral increase in the participants voicing barriers to transformative action, namely the lack of departmental and professor support and the growing discrepancy in andragogy with the professors they were assisting. Findings revealed the transformation of the participants and exposed the limitations of the course.

Specific recommendations that emerged include 1) conducting a future study into IA reflection and transformation, 2) expanding professional development opportunities for new IAs 3) increasing levels of

support from departments and professors of record to effectively mentor IAs, and 4) encouraging those in teaching positions to use empirically-based methods for learning to provide consistency in andragogy between professors and their assistants. The roundtable session will engage participants in discussion regarding ways to facilitate these recommendations, as well as generating new suggestions.

SELECT REFERENCES

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