Metaphors as a Means to Address Student Teachers' Thinking

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SUMMARY

This article presents a justification for the use of metaphors as a tool in building up teacher trainees' professional identity, reflective skills and their pedagogical thinking. First, the predominant areas of research in reflective practice in Finland are discussed. The findings in recent research about the mentoring relationship and underlying facts therein are challenging teacher educators to leave the comfort zone and to question the status quo. We should ask ourselves: How to effectively enhance the novice teachers in their capacity build-up and empowerment? What is the role of a systematic approach to encourage student teachers to develop and reshape their own metaphors along with their teacher training? Answering the questions above results in a mentoring metaphor and reporting on how it is utilized.

Key words: teacher training, metaphors, pedagogical thinking, reflection, mentor roles

Introduction

Aware of the demands put on teacher training today, teacher educators in Finland have understood the importance to develop their research skills and to innovate new practices for teaching and learning. Current emphasis on teachers as researchers implies the need to be critical, to reflect on and to be able to solve problems. Thus, teacher training in Finland intends to meet these needs not only encompassing student research along with the pedagogical studies but also highlighting the researching practitioner regarding the qualifications of mentoring teachers at teacher training schools. Given that teacher training features well founded, theory based reasoning, theory put in practice, analytic links to recent research when giving feedback and self-experienced action research cycles, the aspiring teachers also themselves engage in challenging their assumptions, in re-examining their values and in reflecting on what is done. Donald Schön, the American philosopher, pointed out in this book, *The Reflective Practitioner that* we learn not so much from our experience, but from our reflection on our experience.

Furthermore, the OECD report *Teachers Matter* (2005), calls for a shift of emphasis in initial teacher education towards a reflective practitioner approach. This report states: *'Initial teacher education must not only provide sound basic training in subject-matter knowledge, pedagogy related to subjects, and general pedagogical knowledge; it also needs to develop the skills for reflective practice and research on the job'.*

Teaching practice in subject teacher training

The growth of teacher professionalism is an individual process. Nevertheless, this process can be monitored through mentoring, supervision and feedback. There are three equally contributing factors in mentoring and feedback procedures: mastering the core terminology of education, strengthening the working theory of the student teacher and reflecting on the learning process. In general, the main goal of the guided practicing periods is to support the individual teaching-studying-learning processes.

Research on teacher training

Finnish researchers have steadily shown interest in the mentoring procedures which are an essential part of the teaching practice. Kansanen (1993) has done extensive research on teachers' pedagogical thinking. It implies either deliberate or unconscious choices, where teachers' pedagogical thinking according to Jyrhämä (2002, 20) focuses on teaching-studying-learning process or its separable parts. Consequently the goals of a teaching act and the interaction within it are the main targets.

Further, as reported by Winter (2010) Jyrhämä and Syrjäläinen (2009, 420 - 421) summarize the most relevant research areas on mentoring as follows:
A. reflection and the meaning of constant self-development as a teacher and a mentor
B. the problem of equality in the mentoring relationship
C. dialogue as a goal in the mentoring process
D. the multifarious nature of mentoring in teaching practice
E. the role of the mentor.

As a synthesis of earlier studies Jyrhämä and Syrjäläinen (2009) state that the different roles adopted by the mentor are realized effectively by dialogue when channeling mentor's interpretations and the needs of the student teacher. What kind of roles are the most favorable? How to enhance the development of the student teacher in the best possible way?

Conceptualizing pedagogical thinking

Mentoring is realized through role-taking. However, current research in Finland has mainly concentrated on teacher trainers' roles. It would be interesting to study the effect of metaphors and roles adopted by student teachers on their pedagogical thinking, on concept build-up and on professionalism. Thus, the challenges faced in teacher education advocate changes in teacher education. Mentoring has to be developed. Mentors themselves should be aware of their own pedagogical philosophy and working theory. Developing mentoring metaphors and conceptualizing mentors' pedagogical thinking justify the dialogues teacher educators are leading daily. In order to reach the goals set for teacher training, also the mentors should be active in research, self-reflection and method development.

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