

Using the Consultancy Protocol for Student Teaching Internship Seminars

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Introduction / Need for the Innovation

Novice teacher reflection is paramount during the student teaching internship. Dewey (1910) believed reflective thinking is thought that requires mulling the idea over in one's head. In order to achieve this with a novice teacher, teacher educators often model reflective thought processes during student teaching seminars (Calderhead, 1989). Dewey (1910, p. 72) outlined five distinct steps to reflection: 1) a felt difficulty; 2) its location and definition (perspective); 3) suggestion of a possible solution; 4) development by reasoning of the bearing of the suggestion; and 5) further observation and experimentation, leading to its acceptance or rejection.

Traditionally, seminars held during student teaching are face-to-face meetings that occur with a cohort of student teaching interns. The frequency of these meetings varies, but the focus of these seminars is to assist student teachers in reflecting on the student teaching experience and provide a forum for open discussion and problem solving. The hope is that these aspiring teachers then develop a learning community that extends beyond the student teaching internship (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Topics may include school culture, the learning environment, student discipline, planning effective lessons, meeting the requirements of the internship, and more. Student teaching internship seminars are vital because they allow student teachers to reflect on an authentic experience and broaden perspectives (Darling-Hammond, 2000). However, the outcomes of these seminars may be diminished, due to the lack of honest sharing amongst peers, the negative tone seminars may take, or superficial conversations and lack of in-depth analysis that get to the root of a dilemma. In order to overcome these pitfalls, the facilitator often becomes the problem solver. However, the facilitator as a knowledge giver is counterintuitive to building a cohort of reflective professionals and effective teachers.

How it Works / Methodology

Student teaching seminars in [state] were adapted to guide student teaching interns through the National School Reform's Consultancy Protocol (NSRF, 2015). Prior to the first seminar, student teaching interns are asked to think of a dilemma and work through a series of prompts beforehand to shape their dilemma into a focused question. During the seminar, the student teachers share their dilemmas aloud as the teacher educator writes the dilemmas on the board. After all student teachers have shared their dilemma, one teacher educator reviews the protocol steps with the entire group, while the other assigns the interns to groups of five (based upon their shared dilemma) and selects the student teachers who will present their dilemmas. The teacher educator (one per group) then facilitates the consultancy protocol, keeps track of time, and holds the group accountable to the protocol. Up to five minutes is allowed for the majority of the steps in the consultancy protocol, as follows: 1) presenters (the student teachers selected to share) share their dilemmas with their respective group; 2) listeners (the four peer student-teaching interns) ask clarifying questions (who, what, when, where, and how, but not why); 3) the presenters then push back their chairs and turn away from their groups, while carefully listening to the group's discussion; 4) the listeners share their understanding of what they heard, sticking to the facts and without speculation or solution suggestions; 5) the listening groups then try to make sense of their dilemma by sharing what they think is happening; 6) the presenters return to their groups, and the listeners ask if they grasped the dilemma accurately, while the presenters fill in any missing details; 7) using a quick guide to probing questions available from

NSRF, members of the listening group write down two questions to ask their presenter; 8) the presenters then receive the questions, read each question aloud, and chose the two or three probing questions that triggered the strongest emotional response; 9) the presenters then again push away from the group and take notes on the next step; and 10) the listeners discuss their suggestions for addressing the dilemma, while the presenters listen carefully and take notes. This is a free-flowing conversation among the listeners as they wonder aloud about possible solutions and their effectiveness. After these “wonderings” are discussed, the presenters return to their groups and share their thoughts and the next steps they plan to take to address the dilemma. As a final step, the teacher educator (group facilitator) leads a brief reflection of the process and outcomes.

Results to Date / Implications

The consultancy protocol was first used in spring 2019 during the first student teaching intern seminar. Student teachers developed their dilemmas ahead of time. In comparison to previous years, the dilemmas shared were more diverse, and the discussion was much deeper. The dilemmas were also presented as focus questions, rather than as general concerns. We found that having the students phrase their dilemmas as a question resulted in more thoughtful sharing of the dilemma. This protocol allowed presenters and listeners to share their thoughts without interruption, prevented everyone from jumping to solutions before carefully examining the dilemma, and kept the presenter from being negative or giving up. The role of the teacher educator was that of a true facilitator and allowed for peer-to-peer interaction in a way that didn't place judgment on either the presenter or the listener. As a result, the presenter was more open to sharing. As the protocol states, the listeners provided feedback in the form of wonderings, which prevented their suggestions from coming across as directives to the presenters. As a result, the presenters felt more empowered in implementing their solution(s) after having sought the advice of their peers in solving their dilemma. The consultancy protocol replaced what can typically become a simplistic advice-giving discussion when challenges in teaching are shared. When using the consultancy protocol, fewer dilemmas can be shared and addressed, but the result is a much deeper understanding of the dilemma and a stronger plan of action for the presenter. Additionally, the interns provided positive feedback on the protocol and indicated that it was very helpful to them as both presenters and listeners. They indicated that the process was helpful in thinking though other dilemmas they face, and the teacher educators involved saw firsthand an exciting level of thought and reflection that is often missing.

Future Plans / Advice to Others

Plans are to continue using the consultancy protocol. The protocol can be cumbersome at first, but once the interns begin moving through the steps, the process becomes clearer, and rich discussion ensues. Reviewing directions and steps beforehand is important, and facilitators need to be very familiar with the protocol. The interns initially struggled when asking clarifying questions, but reminding them to think like a detective made this an effective step in the process. Finally, a few of the steps of the protocol could possibly be combined for greater time efficiency, when needed, without sacrificing the quality of the discussion.

Costs / Resources Needed

There are no additional costs associated with this idea. Facilitators should take time to read and understand the protocol and download the helpful resources from the NSRF website.

References

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