



Experiential Learning to Facilitate Transfer Between Theory and Practice in Teacher Training Program

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Abstract

Students enrolled in teacher education programs are reluctant to use their theoretical knowledge in their internship. However, the educational program introduced in the 2000s, was designed to professionalize teachers by providing training in critical thinking and the use of research evidence to support classroom interventions. Several studies have explained this problem by the misuse of internships and others by the use of too traditional approaches in universities. In this research, we chose to explore experiential learning as an active learning pedagogy to examine how it could facilitate the transfer between theory and practice by measuring motivational variables involved. In the fall of 2018, four professors will use experiential learning during their course to validate this approach. In addition, this research will examine whether experiential learning will develop in students a sense of self-confidence and a sense of self-efficacy that allows them to be tested in internship.

Keywords: Instructional Strategies, Experiential Learning, Theory-Practice Transfer

1. Introduction

Students enrolled in teacher training programs are unlikely to transfer what they learn in their courses to their internships (Wæge and Haugaløkken). According to research conducted by Altet (2004), 42% of trainees in vocational training reject all theories they consider remote from action or practice. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (1999) come to the same conclusion fifteen years earlier, arguing that theories taught in university training programs are not integrated into practice because students draw more inspiration from what they observe in their internships. Moreover, Boraita and Crahay (2013) has shown that when faced with teaching problems, future teachers often choose interventions that are not based on university learning, but rather on their own experiences in school. Finally, the research results of Prince, (2010) lead us to believe that the lack of transfer between theory and practice is due to a lack of self-confidence.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Linking Theory And Practice

The lack of transfer between theory and practice is an issue raised by many teacher education programmes around the world (Wæge and Haugaløkken, 2013). In Quebec, by moving towards the professionalization of teachers and offering solid initial training focused on critical thinking and the use of research data (Ministère de l'éducation), the programs want to encourage their autonomy and accountability. Among other things, the aim was to promote integrated training that emphasizes the links between theory and practice by recognizing the work of teachers while contextualizing the knowledge presented to the university as a reference model.

2.2 Strategies Used In The University Context

Some research suggests looking at the teaching strategies used in universities to try to understand how the transfer between theory and practice can be done effectively. However, according to several studies, the teaching strategies used today are rather traditional (Béchar, 2001; Kozanitis, 2010; Leduc, Ménard, and Le Coguic, 2014) even though there has been an improvement in practices favouring active teaching methods over the past twenty years (Lison and Jutras, 2014). In this regard, students enrolled in teacher

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education often complain that the teaching strategies used at the university are inconsistent with what they are asked to apply in the classroom with their students.

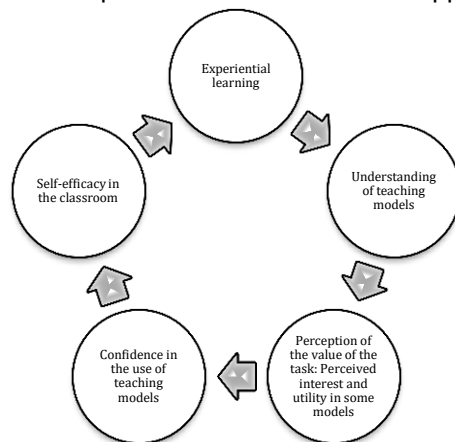
2.3 Experiential learning as an active pedagogy

The most commonly used active pedagogies at the university are problem-based learning, project-based learning, collaborative learning and experiential learning (Wurdinger and Allison, 2017). Experiential learning, initiated by the work of Dewey (1933) and Kolb (1984) is an active and progressive that associates reflection and action in real situation by promoting a better understanding of theoretical concepts, allowing more retention of information and facilitating the transformation of experience into personal knowledge (Chevrier and Charbonneau, 2000). Thus, we believe that experiential learning used in the university context would allow for a better transfer of theory to practice. In addition, experiential learning is very well adapted to the characteristics of today's learners, since they are task and experience-centred, they feel more responsible for their actions and are open to sharing ideas and reflecting on the process (Chevrier and Charbonneau, 2000).

2.4 Characteristics of students

Program managers interviewed by Wurdinger and Allison (2017) value experiential learning because it places learners in real-world work situations where they face trial and error, solves real problems and learns from their mistakes. Faulx and Danse (2015) argue that experiential learning would increase self-confidence necessary to facilitate the translation of theory into action. Because experiential learning involves a learner-centred approach to learning, where emotions are under great stress, some motivational variables, such as perceived value of the task and a sense of self-efficacy (Eccles, 2005 ; Bandura, 2007) may explain why students transfer what they learn in class or not into practice. In the context of initial teacher training, the perception of the value of the task could translate into an interest marked by certain concepts seen in the courses. Thus, the more meaning a student gives to a content taught at the university, the more useful it will be to him and the more likely he will be to use it in an internship class. Similarly, self-confidence in the mastery of certain content taught may encourage students to want to apply it in the classroom. Finally, the sense of self-efficacy in relation to teaching practices is consistent with a future teacher's belief in his ability to plan and intervene in a classroom setting (Bandura, 2007). According to this theory, the greater a person's sense of self-efficacy, the more engaged they are in developing their skills. To illustrate this, we believe that experiential learning used in the university context with future teachers provides a better understanding of teaching models. As a result, they will place more value on certain models (interest) and develop greater confidence in their possible application in the internship class. Finally, experiential learning enables the development of a sense of self-efficacy that emerges from a real classroom application of one or more teaching models seen at the university. The Figure 1 below explains this dynamic.

Fig. 1. Concepts related to the research approach





3. Method

3.1 Objective and research questions

The objective of this research is therefore to examine how the experiential approach can facilitate the transfer between theory and practice and how motivational variables can serve as indicators for the transfer of this knowledge. This objective is reflected in the following questions: Which teaching strategies in the university context are most appropriate to facilitate this transfer? How does experiential learning promote a better understanding of the content taught? What motivational variables (understanding, interest, self-confidence and self-efficacy) are involved in the transfer of theory to practice?

3.2 Subjects

This mixed-type study is aimed at students enrolled in one course of the Bachelor of Education degree who will begin their initial training in the fall of 2018. Four course teachers will use the experiential approach to learning different models of teaching. 200 students will experience such experiences in a 15-course session. We plan to conduct a first data collection at their last course in December 2018. This first questionnaire will focus on understanding, interest and self-confidence in the teaching models seen during the course. A questionnaire measuring self-efficacy will be administered after their internship in April 2019. Semi-directed interviews will be used to deepen student responses.

3.3 Measuring instruments

To measure comprehension, interest and self confidence in the course models, we will use a 27-item questionnaire (9 questions on comprehension, 9 questions on interest and 9 questions on confidence level). These 6-level Likert type category-response items have no neutral choices to avoid central tendency bias. This questionnaire also contains a question on the assessment of the models used in the course. To measure self-efficacy, we will use the Kushner Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Kushner) (1993), which is particularly relevant for future teachers. As this questionnaire is several years old, we will adapt the items according to the current context of future teachers by integrating two specific competences: the planning and managing teaching situations.

3.4 Procedure

The experiment will take place in the course, which will begin in September 2018. The session includes 15 courses, 12 of which are reserved for experiential learning. Since the course focuses on teaching models, students will be introduced to 9 different models. A manual and course notes will be used throughout the session. The research supervisor will be met the four teachers in the month before the session to review the experiential learning process with them. Throughout the session, they will be supported by the research supervisor who will answer their questions as needed.

4. Expected results and Conclusion

This research will validate the relevance or otherwise of using experiential learning as a pedagogical strategy to promote the transfer of learning. Several studies support the use of this strategy in a university context, but specific results of teacher training will confirm its relevance in this particular context. In addition, consideration of motivational variables in the conceptual framework and methodological specification will allow us to draw a more complete picture of the situations related to the transfer between theory and practice.

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