



Microteaching, a “Middle-Aged” Educational Innovation: Still in Fashion?

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Abstract

Despite the fact that teaching practice constitutes a fundamental part of teacher training, it has not yet received the attention it deserves within the Greek educational context. This means: a) that there is still a lack of theoretical studies and empirical research of teaching practice and its various elements, b) that teaching practice and teacher-training procedures, such as microteaching, are still absent from the curricula of the majority of university departments that train prospective teachers. Microteaching, firstly introduced in 1963 at Stanford University by Allen and Ryan as an innovative method of teaching practice and a ground-breaking programme of teaching skills, has been implemented in some Greek university departments that train prospective teachers since the late '80s. Hence, in this paper I investigate microteaching as a method of teaching practice from an empirical perspective in order to provide primary research data and an examination of microteaching as a vehicle of teacher training and teacher professionalization. To this aim, I will present the findings of a questionnaire survey on 332 undergraduate university students of the Department of Primary Education of the Democritus University of Thrace who have participated in microteaching. The analysis and the elaboration of the questionnaire data were carried out with the use of the statistical programme “Statistical Package for the Social Sciences”. I performed a frequency analysis of all the variables and a cross-tabulation between the independent and dependent variables. The research will give us the opportunity to draw useful conclusions on microteaching as a part of teacher education and, in particular, on the training of specific teaching skills and teaching behaviours within this practice. Also, it will document the need for the implementation of microteaching both in teacher education and in in-service teacher training with the utilization of new technologies.

1. Introduction

The present paper consists of two parts, making an effort to answer the following question: Is microteaching, a nearly 50-year old innovation, still in fashion? In the first (theoretical) part, microteaching is briefly discussed as a training method for prospective teachers, with emphasis on its employment in the Greek teacher-education context. In the second part, the findings of a questionnaire survey on 332 undergraduate university students of the Department of Primary Education of the Democritus University of Thrace, who have participated in microteaching, are presented.

2. Microteaching as a teacher-training method

Firstly introduced about half a century ago, in 1963, at Stanford University by Allen and Ryan, microteaching is a training method, which can be regarded as an introductory stage to teaching practice. According to its inventors [1: 1], microteaching is “a training concept that can be applied at various pre-service and in-service stages in the professional development of teachers”. In particular, microteaching helps to train prospective teachers in specific teaching skills and teaching behaviours in small group settings aided by video-recordings [6] and continues to play a significant role in teacher education programmes. After its introduction at Stanford, it has been developed around the world [7] and it has become the object of research interest [3], [4], [8], [9].

In the Greek educational context, microteaching was firstly implemented in the nowadays called School of Pedagogical and Technological Education (ASPETE, at that time SELETE) in the year 1973.

Since then, it has been unceasingly employed in this particular School within the framework of the students' preparation for their teaching practice [5: 47]. As to Greek universities, microteaching was introduced for the first time in the academic year 1987-88 at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where the first (and only) Microteaching Laboratory was established in 1999. Various university departments responsible for training prospective teachers both of primary and of secondary education, among which the Department of Primary Education of the Democritus University of Thrace, have incorporated microteaching since the late '80s in their training programmes.

This specific Department has established microteaching as an obligatory semester-course since the academic year 1992-93 and it constitutes the first in a series of three semester-courses concerning the field of didactic methodology, whereas teaching practice in actual school classes takes place during the last semester of the students' four-year studies. Microteaching is conducted in a fully equipped laboratory, following to a large extent the model established by Prof. Dr. D. Chatzidimou at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. According to this model, a) the students participating in microteaching are first initiated in and informed about specific teaching skills and behaviours during a number of theoretical teaching hours, b) each student performs a microteaching, followed by a detailed analysis and evaluation, c) the students and the supervisor discuss and evaluate the overall course of microteaching at the end of the semester [5: 49-53].

The second and most important part of this model, which is the practical one, takes place as follows: The trainee student teaches a small subject matter to his fellow students, from fifteen to twenty-seven people, according to the overall number of students every year, in a limited period of time (approximately fifteen minutes), having a low number of instructional objectives (usually one). It is argued that this teaching takes place under controlled conditions and in a safe environment, because the audience of the lesson are the trainee's co-students, so there is no need for the trainees to be concerned about their lesson having negative consequences on their students; this way, they are free to employ new ideas and strategies and develop their teaching skills [3]. The trainee's lesson is being videotaped, from its beginning to the end, and afterwards he/she watches his/her presentation on TV, together with his/her fellow students. By videotaping and viewing the lesson, the trainee student and his/her peers have the chance to watch and criticize the lesson step by step, taking advantage of the technology as a means for valuable feedback, creative (self-)evaluation, tips and suggestions, and self-reflection [2]. The trainee can thus estimate by himself/herself and with his/her peers' and supervisor's help the effectiveness of his/her teaching and the fulfillment or not of his/her objectives. When giving feedback, the students focus on certain behaviours and teaching skills employed by the trainee and make suggestions on the things he/she should concentrate on, according to their opinion, in order to improve them. The next step of microteaching is normally that of the re-planning, re-teaching and re-evaluation, but unfortunately this constitutes a luxury that cannot be afforded at this Department due to the high number of students and the lack of time. As can be seen, the microteaching model employed at the University of Thrace is based on the initial model introduced by Allen and Ryan at Stanford.

3. Undergraduate university students on microteaching

Having worked as a scientific co-operator at the above-mentioned Department for the last three academic years, I undertook to investigate the students' point of view regarding microteaching. In order to achieve that, I conducted a questionnaire survey, whose data were collected in the period of January-February 2011. The research sample comprised 332 undergraduate university students of the Department of Primary Education of the Democritus University of Thrace who had participated in microteaching and who were in their third, fourth or higher years of study. The total number of the Department's students who were in their third, fourth or higher years of study was 459, which means that the research sample constituted 72.3% of the overall population in question.

The questionnaire consisted of 29 close questions, and the subjects were asked to declare the level of their agreement or disagreement (five-level Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree) on statements regarding the teaching skills and behaviours exercised during microteaching. The questionnaire's reliability proved to be at a very good level (the reliability alpha –Cronbach's Alpha– of the 29 questions was 0.95 and the split-half reliability was 0.94). The questionnaire also included some questions about the general personal details of the subjects.

The picture that emerged from the analysis of the general personal details of the subjects is the following: the ratio of male to female is 16.3% to 83.7%, verifying the fact that female students currently far outnumber male students in the Departments of Education in Greek universities. 53.3% of

the sample were in their third year, 46.4% in the fourth, and only one subject (0.3%) was in a higher year of study. Their average performance in microteaching was 8.51 (out of 10). As to their overall performance so far in their university studies, 5.1% had a “good” performance, 76.6% a “very good” performance, and 18.3% an “excellent” performance. Moreover, 6.8% of the sample already had a degree from another department of the tertiary education.

The answers of the subjects concerning the level of their agreement to the efficiency that microteaching has in the exercising of elements relevant to all three stages of the teaching procedure (preparation, performance, evaluation) indicated the following (the percentage in parenthesis is the sum of the answers “agree” and “strongly agree”): prospective teachers trained in microteaching learn to use audiovisual aids (79%), to apply the technique of ending a lesson (75.4%), to keep to the time provided for their lesson (74.6%), to be self-critical about their lesson (74.3%), to systematically programme their lesson (72.6%), to apply the technique of introducing a lesson (72.5%), to accept others’ critique on their teaching (72.1%) and to improve themselves in their teaching (70.3%). According to their statements, teaching skills that are also rather sufficiently trained during microteaching are the explicit formulation of the instructional objectives (69.4%), the evaluation of the teaching procedure’s results (68.1%), the selection of appropriate instructional objectives (67.6%), the application of the lecturing-technique (66.1%), the tracing back of the mistakes made by fellow students (65.3%), the application of the discussion-technique (64.3%), the tracing back of the mistakes made by themselves (63.4%), the application of the asking questions-technique (62.8%), the experimentation with various teaching forms (62.7%), the control of their behaviour during their lesson (61.9%) and the avoidance of mistakes made by their peers during their own lesson (61.3%). Subjects also state, with answers ranging from 50% to 60%, that prospective teachers trained in microteaching gain self-confidence in their didactic work (59.2%), they improve their knowledge on the subject they are supposed to teach (58.9%), they learn to provide constructive criticism on their fellow students’ lessons (58%), to apply in practice what they have learned in theory (57.9%) and to analyze various teaching folds (56.4%). Moreover, they generally learn how to teach (54.3%), they get acquainted with the difficulties teachers face in their work (52%) and they learn to eliminate the stress inexperienced teachers face (50.3%). On the other side, microteaching appears to be less effective on the matters of asserting oneself in the classroom (37.6%) and confronting disciplinary issues (31.9%).

The cross-tabulation between the independent and dependent variables revealed the correlations stated below:

- Female students had a better performance than men in microteaching ($\gamma = 0,345$, $p = 0,032$, $\chi^2 = 4,066$, $df = 4$).
- Students with high performance in microteaching also had a high performance in their studies in general ($\gamma = 0,566$, $p = 0,000$, $\chi^2 = 29,203$, $df = 10$).
- Students who were in their third year of study, compared to their fellow fourth-year students, agreed to a larger extent with the statements that prospective teachers trained in microteaching learn to systematically programme their lesson ($\gamma = -0,333$, $p = 0,000$, $\chi^2 = 20,215$, $df = 8$), to evaluate the results of the teaching procedure ($\gamma = -0,402$, $p = 0,000$, $\chi^2 = 27,480$, $df = 8$), to use audiovisual aids ($\gamma = -0,389$, $p = 0,000$, $\chi^2 = 28,430$, $df = 8$), to assert themselves in the classroom ($\gamma = -0,300$, $p = 0,000$, $\chi^2 = 15,675$, $df = 8$), to provide constructive criticism on their fellow students’ lessons ($\gamma = -0,314$, $p = 0,000$, $\chi^2 = 15,121$, $df = 8$).
- Students who already had a degree from another department of the tertiary education agreed to a larger extent with the statement that prospective teachers trained in microteaching learn to assert themselves in the classroom ($\gamma = 0,484$, $p = 0,004$, $\chi^2 = 9,362$, $df = 4$).

4. Conclusions

From the above mentioned findings, it can be concluded that the subjects of the sample had a clearly positive attitude towards microteaching’s efficacy. They found it highly effective in the practice of various skills, concerning mainly the use of audiovisual aids in teaching, the techniques of introducing and ending a lesson, the keeping to the provided time, the systematical preparation, the exercise of self-evaluation and the acceptance of others’ criticism on their lesson.

The findings of the empirical survey presented briefly in this paper indicate the fact that microteaching can play a significant role in teacher education and can contribute to a great extent to the better understanding of the teaching process and its complexities [3], as an element of the improvement of teacher education. Due to the confined space, a detailed comparison to similar surveys, both Greek



and international, is not possible; however, it is emphasized that they are to a great extent in the same direction [5], [3]. In its almost 50 years of existence, microteaching can be regarded as a method of teacher training still current and effective, especially as far as specific teaching skills are concerned. Hence, it could prove to be useful to extend the implementation of microteaching in university departments that train prospective teachers, bearing in mind the fact that the refinement of teacher education is one of the preconditions for the improvement of the quality of school education.

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