



Professional Studies in Teacher Education: A Theoretical Framework

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ABSTRACT

Professional Studies is an important component in teacher education. However, because of lack of understanding of this component, most of the new courses in teacher education are being classified as a component of Professional Studies. This paper discusses the theoretical framework of Professional Studies in teacher education.

Professional Studies provides a theoretical base for meaningful teaching. To say one has achieved competence in teaching it means she has competence in subject knowledge, subject application, class management and assessment, and assessment and recording of pupils' progress. In Professional Studies, students are assisted to develop the all-round competence which will enable them to teach effectively in the variety of contexts they will encounter during their careers.

Keywords:

Professional Studies, teacher education, teaching, pedagogical content knowledge, classroom management

INTRODUCTION

Programmes of teacher education are criticised for stressing theory and ideals at the expense of practice and reality. Since 1990, there has been an intensive debate going on in teachers' colleges about how best to rationalize the structure, organisation and content of Professional Studies. As a result most of the new courses in teacher education are being classified as a component of Professional Studies. There is need to understand the theoretical framework of Professional Studies. This paper discusses the theoretical framework of Professional Studies in teacher education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Marrying Theory and Practice

The idea of Professional Studies implies a partnership between a body of theoretical and practical skills which are needed for achieving competence in the teaching profession (Renshaw, 1971). This means that any meaningful teaching has a theoretical base. To say one has achieved competence in teaching it means she has competence in subject knowledge, subject application, class management and assessment, and assessment and recording of pupils' progress. Competence means the understanding of the constructive model of learning where the learner plays a central role. The teacher acts not only as an operator but also pools knowledge from various sources to facilitate learning and teaching. The implication is that untrained teachers lack a theoretical base for effective teaching.

Initiation into a Profession

Professional Studies aims to make learning to teach an academic exercise. Renshaw (1971) observed that Professional Studies is not limited to the development of technical competence in a narrow, specific task, for the partnership between theoretical and practical knowledge is central to the idea of initiating students into a profession, rather than training them for a trade or occupation. This implies that preparing someone for teaching is more complex than preparation for a trade or occupation. Training for a trade is simpler because the trainee aims to reproduce the same techniques or skills imparted by the trainer in a similar environment. In teaching, a number of variables like pupils' characteristics, resources and content will not present the student with a constant environment all the time. Students must be assisted, whatever their particular repertoires of dispositions and aptitudes, to develop the all-round competence which will enable them to teach effectively in the variety of contexts they will encounter during their careers (McNamara, 1992).

Unintentionally teachers work in a professional 'culture' that rejects detailed scrutiny of the events of teaching (Russel, 1993). Professional Studies aims to provide teachers with perspectives in skills to criticise conservatism that is inherent in their practice. Teachers should be reflective classroom practitioners. Reflection involves systematic inquiry into one's own practice and to deepen her understanding of it (Schon, 1990). One reflects to direct and control practice by reconstructing experience and having a new understanding of action. The idea is to have a better understanding of taken-for-granted assumption of teaching. A teacher can reflect in action or reflect on action (Schon, 1990; Gilroy, 1993). In practice, there is need for teachers to reflect on their teaching and vigilantly question their motives and practices.

Components of Professional Studies

The content of Professional Studies has to be seen to be in harmony with its aims. Renshaw (1971) suggested that in Professional Studies students should be exposed to a multiplicity of curriculum courses which act as an introduction to the basic content of a range of subjects, as well as giving insight into how to teach them. He suggests that the structure of curriculum courses could comprise the interrelated elements of conceptual factual content and methodological aspects. The conceptual aspects would emphasize fundamental ideas and principles, as it would focus on rationale for teaching the aspect. The content would be selected to illustrate some of the salient features of the discipline. The methodological element would concentrate on the procedural skills of the discipline, allied to the practical knowledge of how to teach. The interrelatedness of the components tallies with the view of marrying theory and practice in Professional Studies.

Types of Knowledge in Professional Studies

Proctor (1984) has observed that professional knowledge and professional skills provide a frame work of Professional Studies. The knowledge is subdivided into propositional '*know that*' knowledge and practical '*know how*' knowledge (Proctor, 1984). Propositional knowledge refers to understanding of the job, its context and its aims. Practical knowledge is ability to make practical judgments of what to do. The skills refer to organisational and curricular skills. Organisational skills include managing and controlling classes, motivating children, organizing group and individual learning, using resources, testing children, marking registers and keeping records. Curricular skills focus on ways of developing learners' skills in literacy, numeracy and communication in general.

Professional Studies has three main dimensions which are pedagogical content knowledge, classroom management and pedagogical actions (Schon, 1990). Pedagogical content knowledge includes extended

overview of the subject content knowledge, integration of subject content knowledge and pedagogy, the development of adequate learning tasks and adaptation of learning materials to the differences between learners (Proctor, 1984). Classroom management involves the organisation of learning activities, rule setting and maintenance of those rules and dealing with events which disrupt the working climate in the class. Pedagogical actions include learner guidance, creating conditions for learner motivation and supporting learners to play their role in the group. The main thrust in Professional Studies is to have the three dimensions, namely, pedagogical content knowledge, classroom management and pedagogical actions, to be related in the teaching process.

CONCLUSION

The way Professional Studies is viewed may be influenced by one's orientation for teacher education. Orientations give direction to the practical activities of teacher education programmes such as programme planning, course development, instruction, supervision and evaluation. Learning to teach involves the acquisition of principles and practices derived from the scientific study of teaching offered in Professional Studies (Zeichner, 1983). The ongoing debate on Professional Studies is encouraged as it helps to define its purpose and delimit content. Given the current state of Professional Studies in teachers' colleges; a critique of its structure, content and organisation is health. Teacher education colleges could revisit the courses and content

to be included in Professional Studies in light of the emerging issues from the ongoing debate.

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