

Title

A little less balance in new teachers' professional development. An international teaching internship as a significant personal experience in becoming a teacher.

Scientific abstract

This case study reported on student teachers' and new teachers' personal interpretations in their teaching practice, during and after an international teaching internship, and how this reflected on new teachers' professional development. An international teaching experience interrupts existing, familiar ways of thinking or acting. The findings describe how the interruption of an international internship influenced student teachers' and new teachers' "personal interpretative frameworks" during their teacher training programme and transition from student to teacher. New teachers' personal interpretative framework operates as a lens through which they perceive their job situations, give meaning to it, and reflects the basis on which a beginning teacher grounds their personal decisions or judgements for action. This study used the concepts of (dis)continuity to describe how an international teaching experience influenced the student teachers' existing professional beliefs, knowledge or skills during their attempts to cope with what they perceived as significant socio-cultural obstacles and challenges. Experiencing discontinuity raised beginning teachers' awareness of aspects of their personal interpretative frameworks in various ways. Results show, that experiences of discontinuity marked limits or challenges in existing knowledge or beliefs that was previously taken for granted by the student teachers, making implicit professional beliefs explicit. The student teachers also recognized their personal or moral decisions were frequently based upon on existing teaching knowledge or skills from the Dutch teacher training programme. Such recognition enhanced their understanding that they had to make personal-moral choices how to use appropriate knowledge or skills in a cross-cultural context, or made them reflect on the type of teacher they want to become. In some cases, experiencing discontinuity also made the participants aware of an experiential continuum, as they recognized the value of this previous experience in their present teaching practice as new teachers. Experiential continuity raised an awareness of pedagogical content knowledge they valued, it helped the new teachers' professional self-understanding of existential questions regarding the type of teacher they want to become, or gave comfort and helped them to make sense of problematic, challenging experiences in the present.

Keywords

teachers' professional development; teaching abroad; boundary; beliefs; discontinuity; experiential continuity

Main conclusions

Experiences of discontinuity during an international teaching internship mattered for beginning teachers' professional development in two ways: (1) discontinuity made beginning

teachers' aware of limits or challenges in existing knowledge or beliefs in their personal interpretative framework. Experiencing discontinuity while teaching abroad either offered the student teachers a new or another perspective on existing professional beliefs, teaching knowledge and skills (which was previously taken for granted), or showed them the value of their existing teaching practice. Discontinuity made the student teachers aware that their personal or moral decisions were based upon on previous teaching knowledge or skills from the Dutch teacher training programme, or raised their awareness that they had to make their own choices how to use appropriate knowledge or skills in a cross-cultural context. (2) The previous experiences of discontinuity became personally significant when the experience not only mattered during the international teaching experience, but also continued to influence new teachers' personal interpretative frameworks in the present. Experiential continuity raised an awareness of pedagogical content knowledge they valued, it helped the new teachers' professional self-understanding of existential questions regarding the type of teacher they want to become, or gave comfort and helped them to make sense of problematic, challenging experiences in the present.

Main recommendations

An interruption, for example, an international teaching experience, can become a formative experience. Teacher educators who want to understand student teachers' professional development should therefore focus more on actual moments of discontinuity, and their learning potential, and not only the (learning) outcome.

Discontinuity in a cross-cultural context can also make student teachers' personal-moral interpretations and concerns more explicit and easier to recognize for educators. Experiences of discontinuity can be experiences that educate and form the teacher as a person.

Educators who want to have a richer understanding of when an experience of discontinuity matters for beginning teachers' personal interpretative frameworks have to take an ecological perspective on teacher professional development. An ecological perspective takes past, present and future dimensions into account. During experiences when new teachers face present discontinuity, previous experiences of discontinuity can help inform their judgment or current educational theory.