Chapter 8

Using Reflection to Increase Self-Regulation Among Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Reflection is an important part of self-regulation and self-regulated learning promotes academic success in a variety of settings. In order for students to develop self-regulation, teachers can start early by modeling and explicitly teaching self-regulated learning skills. These skills should first be practiced during teacher training programs by pre-service teachers and teacher educators. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the development of self-regulation through the practice of reflection among pre-service teachers within teacher education programs. This chapter begins with describing the construct of self-regulation and the influence of teacher self-regulation on students. Next, the authors discuss the research and recommend research-based strategies that support the use of reflection as a tool to increase self-regulation skills among pre-service teachers. In the final section the authors discuss implications for teacher education programs and faculty.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a classroom full of students with a teacher scrambling to reach for copies among the mountains of papers on her desk. The lecture begins, but the students are not engaged. The lesson includes related media and some discussion questions from the textbook without much student’s participation. When the lesson is finished, the teacher moves on to the next topic for the day without checking for student understanding. The students do not complain because this means no homework again.

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It can be very obvious when a teacher is unprepared, does not have clear objectives, gets off topic, does not give feedback, or does not adjust instructional strategies to suit students' needs. This is when self-reflection (aka, self-evaluation) should be applied, using available resources, and seeking help from others to help students. Effective teachers are constantly reflecting on their actions and responding to students' needs based on data. That data is part of the ongoing self-evaluation process. In other words, good teachers prioritize student learning over other demands (Roehrig et al., 2012; Stronge, 2007), and this takes reflection over time.

The ineffective teacher described above is the result of poor self-regulation. Self-regulation has been conceptualized in many different ways, but in essence it is the same set of skills and attitudes that educators want to instill in their students. In the academic domain, a self-regulated student plans work time, puts the plan into action, and then reflects on whether that plan was effective. Pre-service teachers are students in this skill domain even though in months (or years) they will be prepared to teach students in a variety of content domains. Before they can guide students to becoming life-long self-regulated learners, they must first reflect on themselves as learners and transfer the same self-regulated skills to the teaching domain. Pre-service teachers who develop self-regulation may be able to more effectively instill these skills in their future learners. Essentially, pre-service teachers who possess self-regulation are able to incorporate these skills into their instructional practices to ensure that their students develop the skills and habits that will help them to succeed in their academic pursuits.

Given the relationship between reflection and self-regulation, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce the development of self-regulation through the practice of reflection among pre-service teachers and within teacher education programs. We begin with describing the construct of self-regulation, its relevance to the teaching profession, and the influence of teacher self-regulation on students. Next, we discuss current teacher education research and recommend research-based strategies that support the use of reflection as a tool to increase self-regulation skills among pre-service teachers. In the final section of this chapter, we discuss implications for teacher education programs and faculty development, as well as ideas for future research to consider.

SELF-REGULATION IN ACADEMIC LEARNING

Before starting our discussion within the context of pre-service teacher education, we first define self-regulation. When we started a formal investigation into the construct of self-regulation, we found that this term means many things to different scholars. Even academic self-regulation manifests in many different forms including the use of learning strategies, control over the learning environment, and a belief in one's abilities. Many areas of psychology have been applied to self-regulation, including personality, cognitive, behavioral, developmental, and biological. In general, self-regulation includes impulse control, the ability to monitor behavior, as well as regulation of thoughts, feelings and even attentional processes (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004). Through self-regulated learning (SRL), students are able to "set goals, monitor their performance, measure their success, and adjust their behavior(s) accordingly" (Skinner, 2013, p. 93).

Although the development of volition – "the tendency to maintain focus and effort toward goals despite potential distractions" (Corno, 1994, p. 229) – in the self-regulatory system is not well understood, social cognitive models of self-regulation have frequently been applied and tested concerning students’ learning. Beyond one's volition, teachers’ beliefs about their teaching responsibilities and ability to influence student learning may play a part in the self-regulation process of teaching (Torres & Tackett, 2016a).
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