Chapter 14
Preservice Teachers’ Self-Reflection Practices When Integrating Educational Technology in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

As digital tools become common in the modern classroom, teachers must be equipped with understanding how to create lessons for modern learning. Reflective teaching practices are one such way to help preservice teachers learn quality skills for both creating and implementing digital tools. While working through the six traits of the reflective practitioner (Eby & Kujawa, 1998) over the course of one semester, 29 participants kept a reflective journal detailing their process of creating a lesson using technology. The creation process also included complete lesson plans and a video presentation of the lesson; the video presentation was submitted to an online education technology conference (www.c2lconference.com). Sources of data included reflective journals, lesson plans, self-reflection questionnaires, and conference evaluations. The emergent themes for both the reflective journals and the comments on the self-reflection were aligned to produce three main themes, which were then connected to the six traits.

INTRODUCTION

The world is moving at a tremendous rate no one knows where. We must prepare our children not for the world of the past- not for our world- but for their world- the world of the future. -John Dewey, (Quoted in Richter, 1945, p. 110)

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Over the past several decades, increased attention has been on the preparation of educators according to the educational reform movement in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Within the focus of teacher preparation, it is essential to include reflective teaching practices. Both preservice and experienced teachers have the opportunity to improve teaching practices when they attend professional developments and are involved in professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004; Senge, 2000), which enhance lessons and benefit student learning. One area of incredible growth in education has been the use and implementation of digital tools with students. As these tools become more common in the modern classroom, teachers must also be equipped with an understanding of how to create lessons for such a modern arena of learning. Reflective teaching practices are one such way to help preservice teachers learn quality skills for both creating and implementing digital tools. Since these tools are changing and transforming so quickly, preservice teachers must be taught ways to reflect on their practice so that the creation process and change process can be used with any tool they want to eventually use with their own students.

Digital tools being used in the classroom is becoming more common and routine. Student engagement and motivation have increased with the implementation of digital tools and technology platforms. All students at various learning levels can use technology. For example, students could use an iPad to take notes on a particular subject. Then they can use the notes to create a final project and use iMovie or Movie Maker to present it to the class. The tools can go beyond simply helping lessons become more efficient, they can also enhance instruction, but using tools in such a way requires depth and understanding as well as practice with the tools.

Teachers must select and determine how digital tools they implement can supplement and enhance instruction. Additionally, teachers should understand how to monitor, train, and facilitate digital tools in the classroom. Access to a virtual conference allows teachers to explore how digital tools are designed, created, and implemented in a classroom. Teachers have access to practice using the digital tools and infusing lessons with the tools learned from the virtual conference. Therefore, teachers gain awareness and feel more comfortable about appropriately and adequately propelling lessons into the classroom environment. Making sure that the digital tools are incorporated for a deeper understanding of learning and for identifying complex ideas is essential. Creating a digital-friendly classroom allows teachers to engage all learners. Technology is evolving and changing classrooms daily and exponentially. Educators and students are exposed to ideas, accessed information, and provided informative text and images much quicker. Students become more familiar with various technologies and are quite savvy in utilizing those tools on future projects, problems, and careers. Being a critical thinker and using higher order thinking skills will guide and assist students as they gain further knowledge in classrooms. As a result, students in the future will be able to transfer and apply knowledge they learned using digital tools and resources. One avenue for understanding such tools and strategies is through online professional development. In this study, the participants were introduced to online professional development through a specific online conference, Connect2Learn (C2L), and asked to submit a proposal of a lesson that included technology that enhanced learning. Throughout the process of creating such a lesson and proposal, the participants were guided through the reflective practice process. Reflective practice is well established in the field of education, and this transformative practice should now be applied to educators’ application and implementation of digital tools in classrooms. As participants used journaling to capture their reflective practices, corresponding data were used to examine how effectively the lessons did implement technology as an enhancing feature for learning. The results detailed in this chapter show a clear connection between the depth of the reflective practice and the success of the lesson presentation proposed for the online conference, C2L.
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