Chapter 16

Tracing the Development of Reflective Competence in Multi–Sited ITE Involving Telecollaboration: Empirical Findings and Pre–Service Teachers’ Promise for Effective Practice and Innovation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter illustrates the process and outcomes of developing reflective competence according to three preservice teachers who participated in a multi-sited learning environment, involving integrated telecollaboration. The learning environment fused together university, virtual and school sites. An ethnographic multiple case study with quantitative measurements was employed to analyse the year-long trajectory of the preservice teachers’ learning to reflect. We gathered audio-visual data from beginning to end of the year, indicating participants’ growing ability to reflect on their own practices, and leading cognitive change and transformation of classroom practices. By tracing multimodal interactions sequentially, we were able to extract guidelines for creating useful collaborative artifact ecologies in Initial Teacher Education and discuss the relationship between reflection, cognitive development and different personality traits. Based on our findings, we empirically substantiate the argument that reflective competence can indeed trigger transformation in Initial Teacher Education.
INTRODUCTION

New curriculums seek versatile reflective practitioners, able to constantly question their practices and modify them accordingly to reach higher standards. This type of practitioners is advocated to promote transformation, innovation, and creative teaching. At the same time, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs become increasingly multimodal and multi-sited looking to enable new teachers to align with contemporary social, cultural and technological advances.

Multi-sited education has been largely criticised for holding weak connections between learning sites (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Calderhead, 1989), thus limiting opportunities for higher-levels of reflection that could account for change and transformation of thinking and classroom practices. Without high levels of reflection, researchers have found that student-teachers are unable to break away from the teaching paradigms they were taught by, and achieve improvement and innovation of classroom practices (Griffiths, 2000). But, as Johnson (1994) stated, pre-service teachers need to become aware of their own beliefs, and allowed opportunities to resolve conflicting or contradictory ideas within their belief systems.

At the same time, Orland-Barak and Yinon (2007) pointed out a largely methodological problem in the investigation of reflection in Initial Teacher Education, indicating the lack of longitudinal investigation on the long-term outcomes of learning to reflect, and reflecting on actual teachers practice after Initial Teacher Education. Using an ethnographic methodology, these authors showed how efficient Initial Teacher Education programs can account for higher levels of reflection in beginning teachers. Indeed, much empirical evidence is required to understand the process of developing reflection in multi-sited hybrid environments, using an emic perspective to data analysis.

In this chapter, we set out to address the literature gaps mentioned above. Concretely, this chapter analyses reflection as a learned skill that develops over time using empirical data from an ethnographic multiple-case study. These data showcase student-teachers’ learning activity in a hybrid environment, involving telecollaboration. In so doing, this chapter seeks to inform teacher preparation programs regarding technology integration by (1) identifying transformative experiences in blended learning environments, integrating telecollaboration; (2) promoting an understanding of the relationships between learning, tasks and specific technology integration; (3) tackling a largely unaddressed gap in teacher reflection literature by studying outcomes across personality cases; (4) examining how student-teachers in this setting critically think about technology integration and evaluate their own competence at integrating technology in classroom practice; (5) discussing the sustainability of learning and transformation, as it empirically derives from this research.

BACKGROUND

Telecollaboration: A Definition

Telecollaboration has also been referred to as Online Interaction and Exchange (OIE) (Dooley & O’Dowd, 2012) and Online Intercultural Exchange (O’Dowd, 2003; 2006). In this chapter, we will use the term telecollaboration as the original and most widely used term to describe the pedagogical arrangement adopted in this research. Telecollaboration is the application of (no particular) computer communication tools to bring together learners from different geographies, linguistic and cultural communities in meaningful interaction. Task-based approaches have been used to engage learners in rich learning-laden
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