Chapter 12
Positioning Teacher Candidates as Self-Regulated, Critically Thinking Learners and Teachers in an Elementary Writing Course With a Tutoring Component

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ABSTRACT

Few interventions attempt to foster teacher candidates’ self-regulated learning and teaching roles concurrently. This chapter explores 12 education majors’ development of self-regulated, critical thinking skills related to learning and teaching as they participated in an elementary writing methods course with a tutoring component. The instructor of the course devised and offered a four-step model of intervention to stimulate the teacher candidates’ self-regulatory dispositions. The teacher candidates perceived their responses to context-specific questions created by the instructor as most beneficial to their development of self-regulated attributes.

INTRODUCTION

Positioning Teacher Candidates as Self-Regulated, Critical Thinkers in an Elementary Writing Methods Course with a Tutoring Component: A Descriptive, Exploratory Study

Self-regulation is not a mental ability or an academic performance skill; rather it is the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills. (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 65)

The capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life is the essence of humanness. (Bandura, 2001)

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A large body of global research focuses on the strong connection between self-regulated learning and academic achievement (Zimmerman, 2008). However, while the disciplines of developmental psychology has a strong interest in self-regulation processes, the field of education has generally neglected the relevance of self-regulatory cognitions and behavior to teacher candidates’ professional development (Benbenutty, White, & Velez, 2015; Buzza & Allinotte, 2013).

Teacher candidates with self-regulatory, critical thinking skills are “active participants in their own learning” (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 5). Moreover, when they work with K-12 students they plan their lessons thoughtfully, are aware of their own teaching strengths, monitor and appraise their own work, make sound instructional decisions, and provide feedback back to their students. Not surprisingly, research shows a relationship between candidates’ self-regulated pedagogy, capabilities to think critically (a sub-component of self-regulation), sense of agency, and their current and future students’ academic success (Benbenutty et al., 2015; Buzza & Allinote, 2013; Phan, 2010).

Scholars note much of what teacher candidates value about self-monitoring their learning and teaching depends upon their own acumen and motivation (Zimmerman, 2015). However, at the same time, teacher educators’ knowledgeable guidance and modeling are crucial to the development and implementation of candidates’ self-regulated cognitions and actions (White & Benbenutty, 2016). Consequently, teacher educators want to know what catalysts might prompt candidates’ self-regulatory skills. But, models of interventions, techniques, experiences, or approaches to support candidates’ self-regulated, critical thinking dispositions remain incomplete (Benbenutty et al., 2015; Boekaerts, 1999; Buzza & Allinotte, 2013).

To close this gap, and also to enrich my own pedagogy as an instructor, I conducted an inquiry to discover in what ways 12 candidates in a semester-long elementary writing methods course with a tutoring component responded to a self-regulated approach to learning and teaching. Although few interventions have attempted to foster candidates’ dual roles of self-regulated learner and teacher (see Kramarski & Kohen, 2015), I sought to discern the candidates’ self-regulatory competencies in both of these areas. Thus, I had two goals for the writing course and for the study: a) to position and explore teacher candidates as self-regulated learners; and, b) to position and explore teacher candidates as self-regulated teachers.

Integrating Self-Directed Learning and Teaching Into the Curriculum

Scholars note setting self-regulatory goals and actions cannot be imposed on teacher candidates by requiring them to follow predetermined, mandated program guidelines (Phan, 2010; Zimmerman, 2008). Therefore, it would be inappropriate and futile for me as the instructor of the course to tell the teacher candidates to acquire self-governing dispositions. Rather, to develop self-regulated behaviors, “teacher candidates need self-regulated teacher educators” (Benbenutty et al., 2015, p. 25) who provide support and direct feedback to help them become active participants in their own learning and teaching (see Boekaerts, 1991). Accordingly, throughout the semester, as is my usual practice, I monitored my own behavior to ensure I demonstrated self-regulatory practices. For example, I attended to the demands of the writing program, such as returning graded assignments on time, meeting privately with candidates, or tutees when necessary, and modeling an individual writing lesson for a candidate and her tutee (see Tillema & Kremer-Hayon, 2002).

Another significant influence on candidates’ self-regulatory behaviors relates to the environmental conditions in which learning takes place (Bandura, 1999). Consequently, in order to achieve my goals for the teacher candidates, I established a classroom climate in which they felt free to explore and discover...