

SYNERGY BETWEEN THE LESSON PLAN AND LESSON PRESENTATION: PRACTICE WHAT YOU PLAN!

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Abstract

The starting point of every lesson to be presented is a lesson plan. The lesson plan maps out the route that the teacher intends to take in the classroom. At teacher education institutions, student teachers are capacitated to master the skills of lesson planning and the skill of lesson presentation. The aim of this study was to investigate why there is no synergy between the student teachers' lesson plans and lesson presentations during teaching practice. Students map out their teaching on a lesson plan, but what they do in the classroom is not a reflection of the lesson plan itself. As a result, the researchers sought to investigate the reasons for this lack of synergy between the lesson plan and the actual lesson presentation. This qualitative research was conducted through semi-structured interviews. A sample of 20 B.Ed. degree student teachers who are in their third year of study were purposefully selected. The findings revealed that most students do not have high regard for lesson planning. The assessment rubric used to evaluate student teachers' teaching competence during teaching practice does not point out any aspects of the lesson plan. Again, student teachers are unsure of how to implement some of the aspects of the lesson plan template, among others identification of prior learning, values, and attitudes, assessment strategies, and expanded opportunities. The study highlighted the need to put more emphasis on the importance of the lesson plan and implementation thereof. It was also recommended that more marks be allocated for the lesson plan on the assessment rubric.

Keywords: Lesson plan, correlation, lesson presentation, teaching practice.

1. Introduction

The Revised policy on the Minimum requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ), 2015 is a policy that lays out a minimum set of agreed-upon competencies for initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in South Africa (Department of Higher education and Training, 2015). This policy sets minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications aimed at ensuring that the higher education system produces teachers of high quality, in line with the needs of the country. It describes clear, specific requirements for the development of learning programmes, as well as guidelines regarding practical and work-integrated learning (WIL) structure. In this paper, the researchers use the term teaching practice. Teaching practice constitutes an essential part of the BEd programme as is school-based work-integrated learning that is supervised and assessed. It is an approach that harmonizes academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and their intended workplaces, in most cases the school environment (Mudzielwana, Joubert & Phatudi, 2016). During this teaching practice period, student teachers are provided with opportunities to practice as a teacher, to develop desirable characteristics of a teacher and values in order to display appropriate professional behaviour (Mudzielwana, Joubert & Phatudi, 2016). Student teachers are also presented with a chance to learn different teaching skills and to effectively plan and present lessons that they were taught during lectures at the institutions of higher learning. This is an opportunity for self-evaluation and to discover their strengths and weaknesses through reflection. They are mostly guided by mentor teachers and their lecturers who are tasked to evaluate them and give them reflective feedback on their performances in the classroom (Lombard, 2015).

The effectiveness of a teacher within a classroom environment is realized through the ability to plan lessons correctly. The lesson plan is a guide for the presentation of the lesson, without which the teacher may go astray (Drake & Jackson, 2016). Good lesson planning is an important aspect where teacher expertise exists (Li & Zou, 2017). According to Du Toit (2016:140), there are five basic questions that need to be considered and these are "what I teach; who are my learners; why am I teaching this; how can I teach this and how successfully do I teach

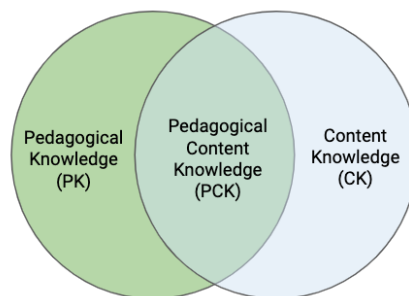
When training student teachers on lesson planning and lesson presentation teacher education institution should ensure that they have the knowledge and understanding of lesson aims and objectives. When formulating aims and objectives, student teachers should know that these should strive to develop the learners holistically. This can be achieved if aims and objectives can include the integration, interrelation, and interconnection between the cognitive domain, psychomotor domain, and affective domain (Drake & Jackson, 2016; Du Toit, 2016).

This is followed by the step on the identification of the major components of teaching and learning which are teacher presentation and learner practice (Drake & Jackson, 2016). Student teachers should know that during this phase they should display their knowledge of the content, the different skills of presenting the content, strategies for interacting with learners, and the ability to interact with different types of learners (Drake & Jackson, 2016; Rusznyak, 2011). The student should meticulously plan learner activities that are in line with the teacher's actions in order to achieve the required objectives. A dissimilarity should be made between guided practice and independent practice activities (Drake & Jackson, 2016). Guided practice activities are those activities that allow learners to demonstrate the application of the new content under the guidance of the student teacher. While independent practice activities are those activities that encourage learner-centered behavior. It allows learners to use the new concepts or skills in a relevant but new context (Drake & Jackson, 2016; Rusznyak, 2011).

2. Theoretical framework

The study is framed by Lee Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) model (Shulman, 1987). PCK was used because it emphasizes the importance of the three knowledge domains that teachers and student teachers must possess to present successful lessons. The three domains as proposed by Lee Shulman are presented in the diagram below and these are Content Knowledge (CK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1987). The knowledge domains that student teachers must possess are explained as follows.

Figure 1. Lee Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) model (Shulman, 1987).



2.1. Content Knowledge (CK)

This domain refers to the outstanding knowledge of the subject matter that teachers must have to teach. A teacher must have a thorough understanding of the subject matter or content that they are going to teach (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Koehler, Mishra & Cain, 2013). The teacher must have expertise in the subject level that he/she will be teaching; for instance, the subject knowledge of mathematics at primary school, high school, and university differs. According to Shulman (1987: 6), the teacher's "content knowledge should embrace subject concepts, theories used in the subject, relevant philosophies, organizational frameworks, evidence, and proof, as well as reputable tactics and ways of developing such knowledge".

2.2. Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)

Pedagogical knowledge refers to a deepened understanding of strategies, methods, and processes that teachers should employ in the teaching and learning of their respective subject specializations (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Koehler, Mishra & Cain, 2013). It involves a thorough understanding of the aims and objectives of a subject, the educational purpose and values of the subject, and the ability to plan activities that will make the learning of the subject easy and making make the subject relevant and enjoyable to learners (Koehler, Mishra & Cain, 2013).

2.3. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

PCK is about the knowledge and understanding of a subject matter taught, meaning the pedagogy of a specific subject. PCK relates to Shulman's (1986: 4) belief that "real teaching requires an understanding

of both content and pedagogy”. It does not require one to be just a content expert or just a pedagogy expert, but it requires teachers to have the expertise to match content with relevant pedagogy so that effective learning can take place (Koehler, Mishra & Cain, 2013). According to Koehler, Mishra & Cain, (2013,14), this knowledge domain “revolves around the teacher’s ability to properly teach, plan relevant activities for learning, understand the core and hidden curriculum, conduct assessment, and report results of a subject”.

3. Research methodology

This study sought to investigate the reasons why student teachers at a university of technology do not synergize their lesson plans with their lessons during teaching practice. A qualitative enquiry which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) involves the study of anything in its consistent environment to attempt to make sense of it regarding the meanings people assign to it, using among others, observations, interviews, and personal experiences, was used to carry out this investigation.

3.1. Data analysis

The explanatory nature of qualitative research is relatively lengthy and more descriptive and leads to the discovery and construction of new meanings, understandings, ideas, and deductions (Delpont and Fouché 2005). Deductions were made and new meanings of the ideas and opinions of the participants when analysing the collected data, were established regarding their challenges pertaining to presenting their lessons in accordance with their lesson plans during teaching practice. Analysis and description of student teachers’ responses were reported by means of rich and thick descriptive explanations which, according to Ponterotto (2006), have to do with lengthy elaborations and interpreting of meanings. The constant comparative method of analysis and interpretation of data was used.

3.2. Data collection

Qualitative data collection techniques were used in this study using semi-structured focus group interviews. A focus group interview is a type of group interview where data emerge from the interaction among participants (Cohen et al 2007). Focus group interviews were conducted with student-teachers in their final year of study. According to Edwards and Hollands (2013), one of the core features of semi-structured interviews is the interactional exchange of dialogue between two or more participants. Dialogues were held with the student teachers to investigate the challenges they encounter during teaching practice, when they plan their lessons as well as present them as planned.

4. Results

After the student teachers’ lessons that they presented during teaching practice were observed and compared with their lesson plans, at the realization that there were aspects of the lesson plans that did not come out as outlined on the lesson plans, we decided to investigate the reasons why this was the case.

Students were asked two questions that were coined to bring about an understanding of the reasons for the lack of synergy between their lesson plans and the actual lessons they presented.

Question 1

Students were first asked about the extent to which they understand the aspects of the lesson plan, and if they could confidently complete the lesson plan template?

10 students claimed they understood all the concepts that are outlined in the lesson plan, however, some of their responses indicated that they had some misconceptions about some of the aspects of the lesson plan. Five of the students acknowledged that there were some aspects that they were not sure of.

Here are some of the responses by those who claimed to understand the lesson plan in its entirety:

- *“The lesson plan template is easy to fill in and it is understandable”*
- *“The lesson plan template helps me a lot because it makes me aware of all the activities that are expected of me as a teacher”*

Even though these students claim to understand all the lesson plan aspects, one of them, attempting to explain what “expanded opportunities” is, which is one of the aspects on the lesson plan, referred to it as a summary of the lesson where the teacher provides final explanations and remarks to the learners. We deduced from this explanation that students still have misconceptions about certain elements of the lesson plan.

The following are some of the responses from students who acknowledged that there are some elements of the lesson plan that they do not quite understand.

- *“I always struggle with the section that requires me to mention the skills, knowledge and attitudes”*

- “There are many teaching methods listed on the lesson plan template to choose from, but I always select question and answer because I am not even sure what scaffolding method is”.

4.1. Discussion (question 1)

Most student teachers view the lesson plan template as an understandable and uncomplicated document, and they do not struggle to complete it fully before their lessons. However, findings reveal that some of them have misconceptions about certain aspects of the template and thus do not complete it correctly. This provides evidence that student teachers lacking pedagogical knowledge (PK), as they have limited comprehension of a variety of teaching methods.

5. Recommendations (question 1)

Subject didactics lecturers must be sensitized about the misconceptions that students have about the lesson plan so that they spend time reinforcing a deeper understanding of the lesson plan.

Lecturers are also encouraged to spend more time facilitating and demonstrating various teaching methods that student teachers are expected to demonstrate competence in.

Question 2

What challenges are you confronted with during your lessons, that derail or cause you to deviate from what you have planned on the lesson plan template?

This question was coined to elicit responses regarding the actual reasons student teachers do not present lessons as they planned them. These are some of their responses:

- *“Learner discipline and classroom management are the challenges that I mostly face in the classroom during lesson presentation. As learners are the ones rotating, they come late to class and disrupt the ongoing lesson. When learners misbehave in the classroom, they delay the lesson and I end up skipping some points in the lesson due to time wasted”.*
- *“Time, class time is very short, and learners are unpredictable. Sometimes you must spend more time explaining one concept than you had planned, leading to not achieving some of the objectives you stated”.*
- *“Having to discover that the teaching strategies that you are using are not helping the learners to acquire the intended knowledge, now you have to use other strategies within the same period, which puts you under pressure because you won’t get extra time for these new adjustments. Also, sometimes gadgets are used to conduct a lesson and it happens that technical errors arise in the middle of the lesson, now you need to rearrange your lesson in such a way that you can still lead the learners to the objectives they need to acquire”.*

6. Discussion (question 2)

Most student teachers indicate that they deviate from their plan as outlined on the lesson plan template because of issues related to learner discipline and time constraints. Student teachers in their final year of study are expected to demonstrate high levels of time management as well as competence in classroom and discipline management, but this is not the case.

One of the students indicates that learners are uncooperative and do not participate in class, as well as pretend to understand what is being taught. This is a clear indication of the lack of pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) on the part of the student teachers. Final year student teachers as facilitators and mediators of learning are expected to possess the skills to get learners engaged or involved in the teaching and learning activities, but again, this does not seem to be the case.

7. Recommendations (question 2)

More intensive pedagogical training is requested to prepare students for both expected and unexpected situations that arise in the teaching and learning arena, such as the management of ill-discipline and the optimal use of time. Students must be intensively trained to become facilitators and mediators of learning equipped with skills to be able to get learners involved in their classroom activities.

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