

The Process of Performing Arts Teachers' Knowledge Transformation in an In-Service Training Course

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Summary

The purpose of this research is to explore the guiding process and meaning of teachers' knowledge transformation in a performing arts teachers' in-service training course from the perspectives of educational environment, performing arts and self-awareness. Two research questions were investigated:

1. How does the guidance of teacher educator influence the elementary and middle school performing arts teachers to transform their teacher knowledge? What do the teachers change?
2. After practical experience in their own classes, what do the performing arts teachers experience and reflect from the process?

In the literature, the content of teacher knowledge was reviewed including "teachers' knowledge" toward the educational environment, specialized knowledge towards performing arts and knowledge of teacher's self-awareness such as a teacher's quality, identification and teaching beliefs. The methods to enhance teachers' knowledge transformation were also investigated as the guideline instructions for the performing arts teachers' in-service course. They included "awakening teacher's awareness of the curriculum, describing teacher's instinctive process and cultivating rational discussion space." The comparison of drama ideology, pedagogy, curriculum outline and content between Taiwan and Western countries were further discussed as part of the class reading and teaching materials for discussions and dialogues among the participant teachers. Moreover, the overall curriculum design process of performing arts and drama were examined for further use in the actual drama classroom.

The research employed a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth and holistic

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understanding of the teacher's perspective of their teacher knowledge. There were 16 teachers in the course which lasted for one semester including 18 three-hour sessions. The teacher educator made specific designs, drawing principles from some literature, for transforming the teachers' knowledge. Many strategies were explored to guide the performing arts teachers such as keeping reflective and critical notes on the pre-reading materials, asking leading questions to stimulate awareness towards the curriculum outline and content, allowing teachers to tell their stories and instinctual feedback, providing an open atmosphere to encourage peer discussions and evaluations, and forming pair or small group collaborative work for peer professional development. Data collections include pre-class questionnaires, reflective homework, classroom observations, group discussions, researcher reflective notes, teacher's teaching reflections and interviews.

Before attending the in-service training course, the teachers were asked to fill in a questionnaire. From the analysis, it appeared that most teachers agreed with the importance of being able to understand the national curriculum outline and competence indicators. Yet, the majority of teachers seemed to encounter certain problems that hindered them from heightening the awareness of their teacher knowledge. After interviewing them, they reported that it was hard to comprehend the national curriculum because of the oversimplified theories, abstract concepts and lack of concrete meanings in the outline descriptions. Meanwhile, teachers were also confused with the concepts of "integrated curriculum" and "school-based curriculum." Even though some teachers were familiar with the three major aspects of the Arts and Humanity course domain, i.e., "Exploration and Expression," "Appreciation and Comprehension" and "Implementation and Application," most teachers still could not comprehend the overall meaning, let alone to further explore the competence indicators under each aspect. Furthermore, it showed that most teachers had a hard time connecting the indicators to the actual design of the curriculum and thus impaired the teacher's ability to make critical evaluations of the textbooks they constantly used.

After the course, the results showed that teachers' knowledge toward the performing arts educational environment have changed to a certain degree. The changes included their understanding toward the national curriculum outline of the domain of Arts and Humanities, new interpretations of the competence indicators in the national curriculum, and further clarifications of the concepts of integrated curriculum and school-based curriculum. Moreover, through group curriculum design process and text evaluations of different versions of the Arts and Humanity books, the participant teachers started to become thoughtful of their regular use of their textbooks. It was reported that the process helped them to realize the importance of owing teacher's own specialized knowledge of performing arts. The results also showed that teachers have new

references to use when doing curriculum design and choosing appropriate materials from the textbooks.

From the 7th to 11th sessions, the teacher educator asked the teachers to engage in peer drama teaching and assessment analysis in the class. Then, they were required to plan 3 to 4 lessons for their students and return to teach in their own classrooms. Afterwards, they came to the in-service class again and discussed their observational notes and reflective reports of their work. Interviews were conducted to collect data that would gain a deeper understanding of the teacher's change in knowledge. In analyzing the data, three areas of teacher's knowledge emerged. First, educational environment knowledge -- teachers gained a deeper awareness of the overall curriculum context and design aspects. Second, specialized knowledge of drama curriculum -- most teachers mentioned that they started to learn to not rely too much on the textbooks they used for years. When analyzing the lessons, it shows that some teachers were able to design their lessons from a holistic aspect of the curriculum; some even started out from the life experiences and perspectives of their students. It seemed that teachers were transformed from "curriculum executors" to real "curriculum designers." Third, teacher's self-awareness -- most teachers reflected that they gained new understandings and personal meanings toward their own teaching beliefs. Some felt the importance of making reflective notes after each drama class; some also found the actual meaning of performing arts to their students such as self-confidence, willingness to share and cooperate with each other. Other teachers are finding new meanings from interacting with their students. Some thought, "Drama should not just be a cluster of theatre games;" some believed that teachers should return "learning ownership" to their students. This was quite a breakthrough when contrasted to the regular teacher-centered beliefs.

In conclusion, the instructional guidance of the teacher educator in the course could provide suggestions for future in-service training programs, especially for facilitating three different aspects of teacher's knowledge. The reflections and awareness of teacher's knowledge shown in the study demonstrate the importance of providing teachers with in-service courses and developing peer groups for furthering their professional development. When a teacher becomes a transformative learner, he/she will become the actual catalyst for new educational reform in the future. Hopefully, this study will pave the way to new research projects which will help consolidate the study of teacher's knowledge at a scientific level.