

Hong Kong Preservice Teachers' Focus of Concerns and Confidence to Teach - A Perspective of Teacher Development

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Abstract: A survey study was conducted to examine a group of preservice student teachers' focus of concerns and confidence to teach as part of the investigated areas of teacher development in a teacher education institute in Hong Kong. The obtained result supported Fuller's model of concerns in that "self" concerns were prominent within the sample under study. Of the "self" concerns, class discipline, acceptance by pupils and teachers' mastery of subject knowledge and teaching skill were classified the most important ones by the preservice teachers. The high level of confidence and optimism exhibited before teaching practice also supported Weinstein's findings that preservice teachers were unrealistically optimistic about teaching. The authors would like to draw the attention of teacher educators and program planners to the underlying reasons given by preservice teachers about their changes in confidence, optimism and concerns before and after teaching practice in order to focus the areas for future development in teacher education.

Introduction

Professional development is always one of the focusing areas of research in teacher education (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Day, C., Calderhead & Denicolo, 1993; Kagan, 1992). Different aspects of teacher development has been investigated by researchers such as the stages of development, mentorship, practical knowledge, teachers thinking and belief (Bullough & Baughman, 1993; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Grossman, 1995; Nespor, 1987; Valli and Agostinelli, 1993). Of the research in teacher professional development, Fuller's (1969) model of concerns has long been used to explain student teachers' stages of development as a teacher. In the model, Fuller (1969) theorized that teacher concerns can be classified into three distinct categories: "self concerns" which center around the individual's concern for their own survival related to their teacher preparation program, including their student teaching experience; "task concerns" which focus upon the duties that teachers must carry out within the school environment; and "impact concerns" which are related to one's ability to make a difference and be successful with his /her students and the teaching/learning process. Fuller (1969) believed that as preservice teachers move through their training, their concerns move from self to task, then finally to impact concerns. A number of researches on teachers' concerns have been conducted based on Fuller's model. For example, O'connor and Taylor (1992) have conducted a concerns study with the students in California State University to ascertain what the concerns of preservice teachers were as they progressed through their professional programs. Based on the findings, O'connor and Taylor (1992) suggested that teacher educators need to have a knowledge of preservice and novice teachers' concerns and to address their concerns in order to decrease the rates of attrition of teacher candidates within their progress. Whether there is a cultural or social differences is also an interesting area of investigation.

Related to the teachers' concern is their confidence to teach. Weinstein (1989, 1990) in the study of American preservice teachers has found that preservice teachers are unrealistically optimistic about teaching before teaching practice. Although they agree with the concern of experienced teachers on class discipline, they are optimistic in handling class teaching and lay much value on teacher pupils relationship. The study by Weinstein is confined to

elementary teachers and the author is interested to know if similar pattern occurs in secondary or high school teachers. O'Connell's (1994) study indicated that the first year teaching was not what the novice teachers expected and many of the previous beliefs and optimism had broken in face of the reality. Thus, the degree of readiness that preservice teachers are prepared for teaching work are reflected from the confidence and optimistic view held by them before and after teaching practice. The changes in confidence and optimism toward teaching after teaching practice and upon completion of teacher education program can also be used as a feedback to teacher educators and teacher education institutes to evaluate the function and adequacy of the course program to help development of the preservice teachers.

Objectives of Study

As teacher educators in Hong Kong for many years, the authors attempted to study the professional development of preservice teachers with respect to the following areas of inquiry.

- (1) What are the concerns and degree of confidence to teach within the Hong Kong preservice teachers ?
- (2) Do the Hong Kong preservice teachers exhibit similar kinds of concerns and confidence to teach as the North American samples reported by Fuller and Weinstein in their findings ?
- (3) Is there any confidence changes indicated by the Hong Kong preservice teachers before and after teaching practice; and if so, what are the changes ?
- (4) What are the possible causes leading to these changes in confidence to teach ?

It was anticipated that the obtained result would provide useful information for teacher educators to evaluate existing teacher education courses and design future teacher education programs which could lessen the concerns of preservice student teachers, and enhance their confidence to teach with appropriate support of what they require to be professionally developed.

Method

The authors had conducted a survey study with 106 preservice student teachers to investigate certain areas of professional development of student teachers, such as their areas of concerns, perceived important factors of successful teaching and their confidence changes before and after teaching practice. This was done through administering a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire to the final year students of the Two year Full-time Certificate in Education Course (Secondary) in the Hong Kong Institute of Education for completion. The items of questionnaire were derived from two sources: first, based on the concepts of the Fuller's Model and the research result of Pigge and Marso (1988) and second, dialogue with preservice student teachers during practicum sessions. Some of the items were structured and the preservice teachers were asked to indicate the ranking of the items according to their perceived degree of importance. Others were open-ended so as to allow respondents to write freely to express their view points. The sample size under study was not large, but was still acceptable for a small scale study.

Result

Characteristics of sample:

Of the sample under study, 20.4% were male and 79.6% were female. The age range was from 20 to 24, most around 21 to 22, which accounted for more than 50% of the sample. Only 4.1% of the sample students had previous full-time working experiences (1 to 2.5 years) before admitted to the Institute. The sample consisted of students who either possessed "A" level passes after Form 7 or completed a preparatory course in the Institute if they were Form 5 graduates.

(1) Focus of Concerns

The preservice student teachers were asked to write down their focus of concerns about teaching before teaching practice and to list them in a rank order from 1 to 5 (1 being the most important and 5 the least important). Their concerns about teaching were categorized according to Fuller's three types of concerns: "survival", "task" and "impact". The percentage distribution of each concern under different rank orders were listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Types of concerns and relative percentages in different ranking

Types of Concerns\Percentages\Ranking	1	2	3	4	5
(A) Self Concerns (S)					
(1) classroom discipline	22.6	18.9	13.2	1.9	-
(2) acceptance by pupils	18.9	5.7	3.8	3.9	5.7
(3) teachers' mastery of subject matter	17.0	7.6	13.2	13.5	-
(4) teachers' mastery of pedagogical content knowledge /teaching skill	9.4	9.4	9.4	15.4	17.1
(5) teacher-pupils' relationship	7.6	5.7	7.6	9.6	20.0
(6) lecturers' comments & assessments	1.9	5.7	5.7	11.5	8.6
(7) regular teachers' comments & assessment	-	-	-	3.8	5.7
(8) the location of the school, whether far away from home or not.	-	-	-	1.9	-
Sub-Total	77.4	53.0	52.9	61.5	57.1
(B) Task Concerns (T)					
(1) pupils' mastery of knowledge	13.2	26.4	18.9	3.9	5.7
(2) progress of scheduled lesson	3.8	3.8	3.8	7.7	8.6
(3) lesson planning	1.9	-	5.7	3.8	5.7
(4) pupils' motivation for learning	1.9	-	-	-	-
(5) support from regular teacher	-	1.9	3.8	1.9	8.6
(6) the curriculum & class level required to teach	-	1.9	-	-	-
(7) design & the use of media	-	-	3.8	3.8	5.7
(8) harmonious relation with other teachers	-	-	1.9	-	-
(9) similar teaching content as required by the regular teacher	-	-	-	1.9	-
Sub-Total	20.8	34.0	37.9	23.0	34.3
(C) Impact Concerns (I)					
(1) pupils' personal growth & moral development	1.9	3.8	1.9	-	2.9
(2) pupils' achievement	-	7.6	5.7	3.8	2.9

(3) influence of teacher on pupils	-	1.9	1.9	11.3	2.9
Sub-Total	1.9	13.3	9.5	15.1	8.7
Total	100.1	100.3	100.3	99.6	100.1

Note: (S) stands for self concerns, (T) stands for task concerns, (I) stands for impact concerns

Some student teachers have given less than 5 concerns, therefore some of the rows are not filled.

(2 = 25.24** ** P < 0.05

(2) Feeling and Degree of Confidence Before Teaching Practice

Preservice student teachers were asked to express their feeling, whether they felt confident, optimistic or pessimistic before teaching practice/practicum, together with the reasons leading to such feelings. The result was given in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 Feeling and degree of confidence before teaching practice

Feeling and Confidence	Percentages
(1) I am optimistic and confident about my teaching practice performance	63.8
(2) Lack of confidence, worry or concern whether one can cope with the pupils.	19.2
(3) Half and half in terms of optimism and confidence level.	10.6
(4) No special feeling /Have not thought of	6.4
Total	100.0

Table 3 Accounting reasons for the expressed feelings and degree of confidence before teaching practice.

(1) Optimistic and confident

(a) It is my personality.

(b) Based on my experience and skill.

(c) I am conscientious and spent much effort in preparing lesson and teaching.

(d) What I have learnt is useful.

(e) It is a Band 1 school, I am very optimistic particularly in class management.

(f) Every day is a new one and every day carries a hope.

(g) I believe all pupils are good and I like to teach.

- (h) I have adequate knowledge in teaching method and subject matter .
- (i) I believe I have good communication skill and know how to cope with changes.
- (j) Pupils will lose confidence in myself if I am not optimistic and confident. If I am pessimistic during practicum, then it will be easy for me to lose interest and will not seek for improvement.
- (k) If you are not optimistic, you cannot survive for 2 months.
- (l) Teaching is a challenge to me because one needs to face different matters, hence I have to be optimistic and confident. Besides, I feel I have achieved a good teaching performance.
- (m) I believe that if one is confident, optimistic and try hard in teaching , then it won't be difficult.
- (n) I am satisfied with the Institute's teacher education program and myself. I believe the Institute can give me advice and support whenever I need.
- (o) Experience of last teaching practice make me think so.
- (p) It is a Band 3 school, so not too hard to manage.
- (q) I only teach Form 1 and Form 2 pupils this year and it's not difficult to deal with junior secondary forms. Last teaching practice, I had to face Form 4 pupils and to teach a subject which I had not learnt .
- (2) Lack of confidence
- (a) Lack of experience.
- (b) Insufficient subject knowledge.
- (c) It is a Band 1 school, challenging and demanding.
- (d) What I have learnt is not sufficient for survival in the classroom.
- (e) The practicing school is a Band 4 school and I worry if I can manage the class discipline
- (3) Half and half in confidence/optimism level
- (a) Impression comes from last year teaching practice.
- (b) The preparation work before practicum has a definite influence.
- (c) I am confident in building up teacher pupils relationship.
- (d) Lack of confidence in one's subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge
- (e) Optimistic but lack of confidence because of being inadequate in subject knowledge.

(f) Quite optimistic but a bit lack of confidence because I still lack of teaching experience.

(4) No special feeling

(a) Teaching is just a job.

(b) Just try one's best.

(3) Feeling and Confidence Level Upon Completion of the Course.

Student teachers were asked to describe their feeling and confidence about teaching upon completion of the course when teaching practice/practicum was over. They were also asked to give any reasons or triggering factors for their change in feeling and confidence about teaching. Results related to their change in confidence level, optimism and pessimism toward teaching were grouped and summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4 Feeling and confidence changes after teaching practice and completion of course

Changes Encountered	Percentages
(1) Still not confident to cope with future teaching work, especially in dealing with unexpected affairs and class management problems; feeling lack of experience and have not learned enough teaching methods.	39.7
(2) Feel more confident and optimistic about teaching behavior; feeling more competent and effective in teaching and dealing with problems.	20.7
(3) Already mastered the general teaching technique. Not too much worry or fear for the future teaching work. Still needs to improve in order to become more effective. (confidence level and optimism can be taken as half and half)	19.0
(4) Little changes after practicum	10.3
(5) Attitude towards teaching and learning become a bit more pessimistic.	6.9
(6) Take a positive attitude towards teaching. Change one's perception of the lower band pupils, believe one can benefit pupils through one's subject teaching. Deeply believe everyone can be taught.	3.5
Total	100.1

Table 5 Accounting reasons for the changes in confidence/optimism level and attitude after teaching practice/ practicum

(1) Still feeling not confident

(a) The more I teach, the more I find myself not competent. There are many weakness which require improvement, especially mastery of subject knowledge. I hope I can make use of the summer vacation to get better prepared. I find teaching is not as easy as I previously thought. Continued study is necessary.

(b) During teaching practice, I encountered a very demanding and serious lecturer whose comment threw all my effort away, causing me to doubt about my ability to teach.

(c) Unhappy practicum experience. The causes for the change came from the regular teacher and the pupils. The regular teacher understood me and was very helpful and supportive. The pupils were the ones I had to face.

- (d) Training is insufficient in many respects especially in subject matter knowledge. One needs to spend a lot of effort and time to equip what I require for future teaching work.
 - (e) Students did not respect teachers and they were unwilling to learn. The teacher's competence is another problem. I don't know how to teach misbehaved students.
 - (f) Triggering factors come from teaching context, pupils, lecturers and regular teachers.
 - (g) It's difficult to predict the behavior of pupils.
 - (h) I have very little teaching experience which cannot be taught by other persons. Moreover, society is changing every moment.
 - (i) I feel experience is more important than learning.
 - (j) The future environment is unfamiliar to me.
 - (k) Some pupils cannot be taught to be good. Class management is terrible.
 - (l) Depend on God.
 - (m) It is better to teach and learn at the same time.
- (2) Feeling more confident and optimistic
- (a) Objectives become more distinct
 - (b) Satisfactory results of the two teaching practice, got the approval of others, hence have a feeling of success.
 - (c) Most influential part is the pupils.
 - (d) Triggering factors: the teaching context, pupils and lecturers.
 - (e) I think teaching context make me change because school is not simply a place for us to teach and learn.
 - (f) I believe I have good communication skill and know how to cope with changes
 - .
 - (g) I am going to integrate the theory I learnt into real practice because I have mastered the psychology and behavior of pupils.
 - (h) I have got a teaching post.
 - (i) Pupils' feedback, principal's understanding and support, and peer group support.
 - (j) I would know what teaching is and have a model to know how to teach. That increase my confidence in the teaching process.
- (3) Half and half in confident/optimism level

- (a) Because I am unclear about the future and immature to master it.
 - (b) I have learnt how to design and test the way for different classes of students.
 - (c) Because I have done my teaching practice.
 - (d) I got confidence because experience accumulated and teaching skill can also be learnt gradually.
 - (e) Apart from confidence, teaching requires the help and support of friends and experienced teachers.
- (4) Little changes after teaching practice / Practicum
- (a) Still feel teaching is a difficult task.
 - (b) Similar to my expectation.
 - (c) Have changes but not great changes. The teaching context and the pupils were the two major triggering factors for changes. The good response /feedback from pupils and their appreciation of my teaching increased my expectation and confidence in teaching.
- (5) Becoming a bit more negative/pessimistic
- (a) I have a clear picture of the teaching context, pupils, subject ..etc. which are not as idealistic as previously thought.
 - (b) Before teaching practice, I have never thought of pupils of today are so poor and badly behaved.
 - (c) Most important is the support of the peers.
- (6) Becoming more positive toward teaching
- (a) Through interpersonal communication.

Discussion of Result

Descriptive statistics were used to illustrate the results obtained. Table 1 showed the percentage distribution of various types of concerns of the preservice teachers about teaching according to different ranking of importance. Altogether the Hong Kong preservice student teachers exhibited 3 kinds of concerns about teaching, similar to that in Fuller's model.. Concerns which were considered the most important to student teachers included class discipline, acceptance or liked by pupils, teachers' mastery of subject matter, pupils' mastery of knowledge and teachers' mastery of pedagogical content knowledge /teaching skill. Many of them belonged to "self" concerns which were about how to survive in the classroom. In fact, the overall frequency counts/percentages of concerns belonging to the "self" category far exceeded those of the "task" and "impact" . "Impact" concerns were much less in comparison with the "task" and "self" concerns.. Computed (2 value indicated a significant difference of the three categories of concerns at 0.05 level. The finding was in support of Fuller's model of concerns that novice or beginning teachers had a greater proportion of "self" concerns and comparatively fewer "task" and "impact" concern. The Hong Kong preservice student teachers exhibited similar kinds and relative proportion of

concerns about teaching as the North American samples reported in Fuller's findings. That is, the Fuller's model of concerns applies to both the western (North America) and Hong Kong context of preservice teacher development.

From Table 2, it showed that over half of the Hong Kong preservice teachers were confident and optimistic about teaching before teaching practice/practicum. The result gave support to Weinstein's findings that novice teachers were unrealistically optimistic about their teaching performance despite that this study consisted of secondary or high school teachers instead of elementary teachers in Weinstein's study. The confidence and optimism of preservice student teachers tended to drop after teaching practice, as indicated in the changes of their feelings and confidence when teaching practice/practicum was over (see Table 4).

Various reasons leading to the preservice student teachers' feelings of optimism and confidence were summarized in Table 3. These include their personalities, beliefs in their competence in teaching method and subject matter knowledge, use and values of the teacher education programs attended in the Institute and previous successful teaching practice experiences, as well as anticipation of the practicing schools comprising of good students. Internal attributes like personalities can be changed little. However, the teacher education institute can foster and enhance preservice teachers' optimism and confidence through the provision of programs that help them to be competent not only in teaching methodology but also subject matter knowledge (also one of the "self" concerns in teaching), and to provide fruitful and successful teaching practice experiences to preservice teachers by means of carefully selected practicing schools.

Table 4 showed the student teachers' changes in level of confidence and optimism in teaching after teaching practice and upon completion of the teacher education course. The figure indicated 39.7% of the preservice student teachers still felt not confident to cope with future teaching work. This was explainable in terms of the realities and practicalities preservice teachers encountered during their teaching practice, which would influence their feelings and confidence toward teaching in future (see Table 5). Many of these problems were associated with lack of adequate experience to deal with unexpected happenings in the classroom, the behavior problems of students, insufficient teaching methods/skills and subject knowledge (these have already been mentioned previously in their types of concerns before teaching practice and still existed as important and influencing factors on the preservice teachers' confidence to teach even after teaching practice/practicum). A number of researches have similarly demonstrated the impact of practicum experience on preservice or novice teachers, including that of Weinstein (1989, 1990). Nevertheless, it was delightful to find that after teaching practice, preservice teachers who still felt confident to cope with future teaching work got a higher figure. In a certain respect, it reflected that the teacher education program did help student teachers in their teaching, although some student teachers had criticized the programs offered by the Institute was theoretical, impractical and not applicable to class situation. The findings implied that there are still much more work to be done by the teacher educators and program planners to modify the teacher education courses to reduce the adverse impression of preservice student teachers. Although theoretical based, the course programs needed to be more practical and applicable to actual school /class teaching context.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study was limited by a relatively small sample size and hence the findings may not be generalizable to other populations. However, it was still acceptable for a small scale study. The authors' attempt to study the preservice student teachers' focus of concerns and their confidence to teach is expected to contribute to research in teacher education since these affective factors would likely influence the professional growth and development of beginning

teachers. The authors wished the study could prove useful to teacher educators and program planners in general as some of the findings were in common with studies conducted in western countries and hence might be applicable to both local and overseas context.

Results indicated that for the Hong Kong preservice teachers under study, "self" concerns were the prominent and paramount concerns of preservice teachers, which included class discipline, acceptance by pupils and teachers' mastery of subject matter and teaching skills, all these were perceived by preservice teachers to be highly influential on their survival in the classrooms. Classroom discipline is a worldwide concern among preservice, novice and even experienced teachers. Probably, this concern becomes more obvious and important as a consequence of universal and compulsory education. With more students of widely differing background (e.g. abilities and needs) admitted to the classroom, it is more challenging and difficult for the teachers to maintain their interest and motivation to learn. This becomes a very strong concern to the novice and beginning teachers, especially the preservice student teachers. Perry and Rog's study (1992) also showed that after teaching practice, the student teachers' concern for discipline rose to the second most frequent response, emphasizing the teachers' needs to be in charge in an orderly classroom. The Hong Kong preservice or beginning teachers, due to lack of experiences and insufficient mastery of subject knowledge and teaching and management skills are particularly concerned about it. Very often, these concerns were perceived by preservice teachers as important factors for successful teaching. In turn, perception of possessing or lacking the abilities to overcome these concerns would affect their confidence and optimism toward teaching. Many of the preservice student teachers were confident and optimistic before teaching practice, but their confidence and optimism level tended to decrease upon facing the realities and practical constraints. They might wonder and queried about the value and uses of the teacher education programs, which were often considered as theoretical, impractical and inapplicable to classroom situation. Teacher educators and planners of teacher education programs might take a chance to review the concerns and confidence behavior of student teachers toward teaching. In particular, their underlying reasons or causes for the changes in confidence to teach would help to focus the areas of future development in teacher education programs and provision of practicum experiences. It was hoped that improvement in teacher education programs and class situation would reduce the too many "self" concerns of preservice teachers and enable them to look more for the "task" and even "impact" concerns for the benefit of their pupils and to increase a high but realistic level of confidence and optimism in our student teachers.

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