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EMERGENT SKILLS AND BELIEFS IN AN INITIAL TEACHER PREPARATION COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Research on teacher preparation has focused primarily on traditional preparation courses or, in the case of ESL, on the university-based BATESL or MATESL courses. In contrast, the present study focuses on the much shorter Trinity Cert. TESOL initial course, involving distance learning modules and a four-week on-campus segment. In particular, it investigates the major constructs, and the key components within each construct, developed by nine trainees, many of whom were complete novices, from the initial signing-up for the course until its completion. Data was collected by means of questionnaires, interviews, written lesson evaluations, feedback from tutors and a stimulated recall procedure during practice teaching.

Results indicated that trainees developed beliefs about teaching which could be grouped in three main sets of constructs: personal, planning and classroom. Personal constructs were found to be comprised of subject matter knowledge, role models and confidence; planning constructs were made up of lesson planning, materials and timing; and the components of classroom constructs were shown to be classroom management, student needs, communication and error correction. Personal constructs were largely present at the beginning of the on-campus four-week course, although subject matter knowledge, in particular, had been developed during the distance learning modules. Planning constructs and classroom constructs, which are shown to be closely intertwined, were seen to undergo rapid development, starting with peer teaching and leading on to classroom practice teaching.

The major outcomes of this study point to the importance of role models that trainees bring to the course, the necessity to develop subject matter knowledge well before the course, the individual differences between the trainees in terms of converting input from the course into output for practice teaching, and the extent to which teachers experienced in another field of teaching are at an advantage over the complete novice. The study concludes with several suggestions for focusing trainees so that they can gain the maximum benefit from the course. In addition, ways in which minor aspects of the course could be improved are put forward.

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