Student Teaching, Self-Reflection, and Social Learning

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ABSTRACT

Student teachers typically submit daily journal entries to their university supervisor in which they reflect on their teaching. Supervisors then provide feedback on to student teachers on a weekly basis. These page-long daily journal entries are intended to reflect on student teachers' experiences in the field and provide a means of processing, analyzing, and self-assessing progress. Journals are further intended as a venue for communication with the university supervisor and can be used as a means of formative assessment.

Daily journals, however, can be problematic in that they are often descriptive rather than analytical, and often fail to get to the heart of teaching and pedagogy. Additionally, logistical issues with journals include student teacher procrastination (waiting until the end of the week to complete all "daily" entries), and a week-long delay in receiving feedback from the professor. Further, written journals don't create a sense of community, especially among students used to daily interactions with professors and peers on a residential campus.

The purpose of this action research is to determine the impact of using an online social learning platform instead of traditional daily journals as a venue for reflection, communication, and assessment. The researcher hopes to distill the journaling process into a streamlined, targeted format that ultimately leads to better student growth as well as building a community of music educators. The researcher also hopes to introduce his students to a technological tool they might eventually use in their own classroom.

Four questions frame the research: 1. To what extent does the use of a social learning platform impact students' ability to reflect on and analyze their teaching? 2. To what extent does the use of a social learning platform empower student teachers to make positive changes in their own teaching? 3. To what extent does the use of a social learning platform enable the instructor to monitor and give timely and useful feedback on teaching? and 4. To what extent does the use of a social learning platform create a learning community between students and the professor?

The population of the study is student teachers in the researcher's fall 2017 and spring 2018 cohorts. Each student will create a profile on Edmodo, a free online learning platform that mimics sites like Facebook and Twitter. Students will post comments (at least one success and one challenge per week) and reply to the contributions of others throughout the week. The student teaching supervisor will also read and comment on posts. At the conclusion of the study, student teacher posts and responses, researcher responses, student teacher interviews, researcher notes, and student teacher surveys will be coded and analyzed for themes.

This project is currently in the data collection phase (4/18/18).

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Applications for Teaching

The researcher has used online journal / blog entries with undergraduate student teachers as well as students in 9-12th grade choral music ensembles. Some thoughts on using journals include:

- Students are already using social media and group chat as a means of sharing information, keeping up to date on assignments, and commiserating.

- Using an online platform builds a social learning community and brings the instructor into the process.

- Blog posts are informal, so students don't feel pressured by grammar, spelling, etc.

- Blog posts are short and targeted assignments that aim for deep thought rather than lengthy response.

- When students miss the mark, comments can be used to refocus and redirect.

- Online educational platforms like Edmodo are used by schools across the country and are private communities where teachers can elect to screen all entries before they are posted.

- Interacting with students on social media style platforms helps model appropriate behavior on other forms of social media.

- Online platforms are convenient for students and the instructor in that they can be accessed from computer, tablet, or smart phone.

- Online blogs facilitate peer assessment and support.

- Entries can be used to report on learning successes, identify musical challenges, or to ask questions of the community.