Transformative Experiences of Pre-service teachers: Narratives from a Field Experience of Directorate of Distance Education

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Abstract

Pre-service teachers have to undergo a field experience as a part of their degree requirement to become effective teachers. Transformative learning is one which persuades the changes in learners' perceptions and includes transformative experiences which shape the learners' conceptions and skills and produce a significant impact on future as well. In the current study the 10 steps of Transformational Learning were implemented for the "Short Term Internship" course at Directorate of Distance Education, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan as an action research. The 20Pre-service teachers were guided throughout the internship period of 20 working days which they spent in private schools of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The Pre-service teacher' transformative experiences were gathered by using qualitative journal writing portfolios and were analyzed using thematic analysis approach. The data depicts that internship was not just a placement but a pathway to their career as it helped them to develop a link between theory and practice and transformed many misconceptions related to teaching and related works, their concepts became clear and vision was broadened. They had a deeper learning that challenged them to understand themselves, the school environment and their abilities in a better way. This Internship program was very informative and full of transformational experiences as it developed the professional connections and broadened vision.

Keywords: Transformative Experiences, Internship, Action Research, Pre-service teachers, Narratives, Pakistan

Introduction

Pre-service teachers have to undergo a field experience as a part of their degree requirement to become effective teachers. They are supposed to do some works other than just classroom teaching e.g record maintaining and public dealing in practical field of work. Transformative learning is one which persuades the changes in learners' perceptions and includes the learning experiences often regarded as transformative experiences which shape the learners conceptions and skills and produce a significant impact as well, these may transform the future as well. Transformative Experience (TE) occurs when students apply classroom concepts in actual life or practical situations. It is a form of Transformative Learning and includes 10 steps of disorienting dilemma, self-examination, sense of alienation, relating discontent to others, explaining options of new behavior, building confidence in new ways, planning a course of action, knowledge to implement plans, experimenting with new roles and reintegration (Mezirow& Taylor, 2011).

The course on Short Term Internship has been developed for MA/BS program of the Department of Education, International Islamic University Islamabad. This course highlights the

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processes involved in working in school setup. The purpose of this course is to train students for performing duties which are carried out in schools other than teaching. Students have to spend 20 working days in schools for this purpose (3 days a week). An internship is a unique aspect of education that integrates study with planned and supervised career-related work experience. Students are involved as non-paid "authentic employees" receiving academic credit for work experiences. The purpose of the program is to develop and strengthen the student's educational and career preparation. An internship will expose the student to the interpersonal relationships a job requires, both with co-workers and supervisors that are essential in obtaining a successful, satisfying career. Internships help in preparing students to work in real work environment.

- 1) Internships are of 6 credit hours and 96 working hours in duration, during which time Intern Teachers are assigned to schools full-time and are expected to participate in all school staff activities, meetings, and other professional activities.
- 2) Internships facilitate professional development opportunities for future teachers.
- 3) Intern Teachers engage in a variety of forms of professional study.
- 4) Intern Teachers engage in self-assessment and evaluation through professional portfolio development.
- 5) Intern Teachers' professional development goals are related to personal professional growth, the context of the internship, and the Knowledge, Skills and Attributes for Interim Certification.
- 6) Evaluation of the internship includes supervisor's evaluation, school evaluation, portfolios, attendance and end term short test. Evaluation of the intern is a continuous process. The evaluation procedure is explained to, and discussed with the intern .Areas of strengths and weaknesses are discussed along with specific suggestions and recommendations. Formative evaluation will be ongoing.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the research was:

i. To gather the transformative experiences of Pre-service teachers during their Short Term Administrative Internship program at Directorate of Distance Education, International Islamic University Islamabad.

Literature Review

Transformation is a radical shift in thinking, perception, and behavior. In individuals, it denotes significant change in the way of sensing the world and relating to internal representations, change that precludes a return to previous mental models and that leads to large alterations in external behavior. *Change*, on the other hand, usually refers to an incremental shift in thinking, feeling, and behavior.

Transformative learning is the expansion of consciousness through the transformation of basic worldview and specific capacities of the self; transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious and critically analyzing underlying premises (Elias, 1997).

An important part of transformative learning is for individuals to change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. This process is fundamentally rational and analytical (Mezirow, 1997 & Grabove 1997).

For learners to change their meaning schemes (specific beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions), "they must engage in critical reflection on their experiences, which in turn leads to a perspective transformation. The meaning schemes that make up meaning structures may change as an individual adds to or integrates ideas within an existing scheme and, in fact, this transformation of meaning schemes occurs routinely through learning. A perspective transformation leading to transformative learning, however, occurs much less frequently. Mezirow believes that this less frequent transformation usually results from a "disorienting dilemma", which is triggered by a life crisis or major life transition, although it may also result from an accumulation of transformations in meaning schemes over a period of time.

For Brown and Posner(2001, p. 274)., transformative learning is "the process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one's experience as a guide to action." This approach to learning, they said, is centered on "dramatic and fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live"

Henderson (2002) made this distinction between transformative learning theory and transformational change theory: Transformative learning theory has its roots in adult learning theory, thus its focus on the cognitive learning processes of the adult individual. Transformational change theory, on the other hand, finds its origins in the social sciences, which examine the effect of social influences that are external to people.

The perspective is explained by Mezirow as follows:

- 1. Disorienting dilemma
- 2. Self-examination
- 3. Sense of alienation
- 4. Relating discontent to others
- 5. Explaining options of new behavior
- 6. Building confidence in new ways
- 7. Planning a course of action
- 8. Knowledge to implement plans
- 9. Experimenting with new roles
- 10. Reintegration (Mezirow, 2000).

Philosophy of Transformative Experience

Transformative experiences have an epistemic dimension and a personal dimension. An epistemically transformative experience is an experience that provides knowledge that is epistemically inaccessible to the knower until he or she has that experience. As one might put it, the content of the proposition describing the experience is graspable only by having the experience itself. The paradigmatic cases of such experience involve cognitive phenomenological states, such as the state of knowing what it's like to see color or the state of knowing what it's like to hear music. A personally transformative experience involves an experience that transforms the self, the subjective preferences, or the epistemic states of a knower in some deep and perhaps even unpredictable way.

Transformative experiences raise distinctive philosophical questions about individual decision-making, because a transformative experience that is both epistemically and personally transformative can change, in a way that is epistemically inaccessible to the decision-maker before the experience, one's preferences concerning the acts that can lead to the new outcomes. Transformative choices, then, ask you to make a decision where you must manage different

selves at different times, with different sets of preferences, but where the proposed changes are epistemically inaccessible to you before you choose whether to become the new self.

Transformative Experience

As we live our lives, we repeatedly make decisions that shape our future circumstances and affect the sort of person we will be. Some of these decisions are major, life-changing decisions: in such cases, we stand at a personal crossroads and must choose our direction. Transformative Experience raises questions about how we are to rationally and authentically make these sorts of life-changing decisions about our futures. When making major life choices, such as whether to start a family, or what career to pursue, it is natural to assess our options by imaginatively modeling different possible experiences and projecting ourselves forward into different possible future outcomes. But for choices like this, involving dramatically new experiences, we are often confronted by the brute fact that before we undergo the experience, we know very little about what these outcomes will be like from our own first-personal perspective. This has serious implications for our decisions. If we are to make life choices in the way we naturally and intuitively want to—by considering what we care about, and what our future selves will be like—we only learn what we really need to know after we have already committed ourselves. If we try to escape the dilemma by avoiding the new experience we still do have a choice (Paul, 2014).

Potentially, collegiate internships provide constructive and insightful experiences for all stakeholders, namely the participating student interns, sponsoring firms, and collegiate initiators. Uncritical and pragmatic student assumptions and experiences may also have resulted in what we understand as 'self-limiting internships', which provide impoverished learning opportunities for all stakeholders. Before considering the specifics of student perception, we will examine the general models and theoretical foundations upon which professional and collegiate internships are constructed.

For Mezirow, learning not only involves gaining new information, but also fundamental change must in some way be part of what one has learned. This involves transforming the way we understand and interpret our world through a critical reflection of our assumptions and beliefs. Learning also involves emotional processes that result in a shift in self-perceptions and in how others are perceived. Learning "is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 162). Through critical reflection, individuals may begin to reassess their assumptions and perceptions. Mezirow (1990) describes the process of perspective transformation as;

"the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectations to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings." (p. 14)

Some events in a person's life are so powerful, so life-altering, that there's a sense in which he or she may not be the same person before and after the event.

To qualify for academic credit, students were required to maintain a reflective journal and write a series of short papers on relevant theoretical issues connected with the experience. We reviewed the journals and papers that had been submitted and also conducted unstructured

individual exit interviews with interns, where we sought their opinions and impressions of the experience.

The internship can lead specific competencies and skills but it can also provide a much broader challenge: discovering something about the nature of work and about ourselves. While interns have previously seen narrow range competence acquisition as important, the nature of work and of career continues to change significantly (Arnold 1997). Rather than internships being regarded as passive events, we see them as a powerful confluence of benefits and opportunities for all stakeholders. Rather than focusing on limited, short-term benefits, interest internships should be recast as the opportunity for student and organizational learning. Rather than color between the lines we see the opportunity, and the resulting benefit, for novel, creative, and challenging engagements between interns and their sponsors. Again, such an opportunity cannot lead to truly transformational possibilities unless there is a reconsideration of not only the scope but also the power associated with internships.

Initial teacher education programs are continuously looking for ways to grow and evolve to meet the changing needs of pre-service teachers who will face a diverse student population when they begin their careers. As teacher educators, we should continually look for ways to enhance, broaden and deepen student experience. What we have articulated here balances hope and excitement in our work with the many challenges inherent in these types of experiences (Sean, Timothy, and Julie, 2014).

An internship in a unique aspect of education that integrates study with planned and supervised career related work experience. Students are involved as non-paid "authentic employees" receiving academic credit for work experiences. The purpose of the program is to develop and strengthen the student's educational and career preparation.

Several key elements of the transformational learning process are cited frequently in the literature. Initially, a disorienting dilemma, or "an activating even that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard or read" (Cranton, 2002, p. 66) and may contribute to a readiness for change (Taylor, 2000). Cranton (2002) describes this as a "catalyst for transformation" (p. 66). It could be a single event or a series of events that occur over a much longer period as in "an accretion of transformation in points of view" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7). For example, engaging in problem solving may challenge and expose discrepancies (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2000).

Research Methodology

Action research is either research initiated to solve an immediate problem or a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a "community of practice" to improve the way they address issues and solve problems. There are two types of action research: participatory action research and practical action research. Denscombe (2010, p. 6) writes that an action research strategy's purpose is to solve a particular problem and to produce guidelines for best practice. Elements of the educational internship experience that emerged from students who participated in this study include initial apprehension, disbelief, and even fear; a disorienting dilemma or incongruent experience within the new school cultural context; a re-evaluation of their frames of reference, and a final emergence of more integrative, inclusive senses of self as "teacher" and "learner." In the classroom and during Internship 10 steps of Transformation were experienced by the interns but they all were not on the same stage of transformative experience. They were experiencing the Disorienting dilemma, Self-examination with feelings, Critical assessment of assumptions and

relationships, Recognition of one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared, Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, Provisional trying of new roles, Building competence/confidence in new roles and relationships, Planning a course of action, Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, Acquire knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan and A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective during their internship. They were discussing time and again on which step they are currently ad how they are experiencing transformation through their very first practical experience in the field.

Sample

The 20Pre-service teachers enrolled in their second last semester of pre-service teacher education programs at Directorate of Distance Education, International Islamic University comprised the sample of the study. They were being supervised by the researchers during Internship.

Data Collection

The Pre-service teachers' transformative experiences were gathered by using a qualitative journal writing portfolios having the personal narratives mentioning the activities, experiences and reflections. The guidelines of developing and maintaining the portfolios were provided to the students teachers at the beginning of their 20 working days internship which they had completed in different private sector schools of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis approach. Out of the reflective journals which the interns were supposed to submit as a part of the internship requirement were analyzed to see the transformative experiences which were felt by the interns during working in their schools.

Results of the Study

On the basis of the transcribed field experiences of interns, the following is depicted:

Theme I: Works Done During Short Term Internship

The interns have completed the following works in their practicing schools:

- 1 Time table making
- 2 Academic calendar
- 3 Day mistress duty
- 4 Record keeping
- 5 Public dealing
- 6 Organizing Co-curricular activities
- 7 Conducting Morning Assembly
- 8 Admissions and withdrawals record
- 9 Accounts work including fee records
- 10 Maintaining discipline of students
- 11 Cleanliness checking
- 12 Maintenance of office documentation
- 13 Conducting and organizing Parent Teacher Meeting

Theme II: Skills and qualification gained from the internship

I have learned many things from this internship. I learned how I can deal with parents, how I can control different behavior of students. And the most important I learned to be responsible for different tasks.

- Confidence
- Communication skill
- Typing in Urdu and Arabic
- Time Management
- Events management
- Group work
- Co-operation
- To work under someone

Through this internship I learned how effectively deal with public in certain conditions. My communication skill is enhancing. I learn how to work with more effectively. I learn to face the problems and also learn how to effectively solve that problem.

All the professional skills (i.e. interpersonal skills, punctuality, ethical commitment, discipline, commitment and knowledge of job) which are needed in field work along with negotiations are developed in me through internship. Besides that I've also learned about Academic Calendar, Time table making and implementation, Day Mistress Duty (Break Duty), Record keeping (of students, classes and teachers), Public dealing, Co-curricular activities, Morning Assembly, Admission and Withdrawals, Accounts, Fee etc, Maintaining discipline, Cleanliness checking, Conduction of (exams, tests, date sheet), Library records keeping, Maintaining office documentation and Parent-Teacher meetings along with critical thinking.

I have gained type of knowledge from internship period. The following skills are enhanced in this period:-

Patience

During this period tolerance and patience are developed in me.

Communication skill

Communication skills play a vital role for dealing with people. What to communicate, when to communicate, and where to communicate. It was enhanced while taking classes and while discussing many issues regarded students and school with different teachers.

Writing skill

Writing skill is enhanced by preparing work sheets and the writing on white board helped me to write in better way.

Problem solving skill

Problem solving skill builds up while taking classes' day mistress duty and public dealing. The teacher while teaching resolves the conflicts of students. The day mistress has to manage students' problem and in public dealing it is important to satisfy and provide better solution to parents problems regarding their children i.e., the problem may be related to the study or behavior of the student etc.

Creativity

Creative work is enhanced in this period, while discussing with teachers I got new ideas how to utilize our raw material and scarce resources.

Theme III: Responsibilities undertaken during the internship period

I took many responsibilities during these 20 days. I cleared all the previous fee records. I prepared students for annual day, gave day mistress duty, conducted morning assembly, public dealing, decorated classes and maintained discipline.

During my internship I had been given the following responsibilities:

- School inspection
- Computer work
- Files Maintenance
- Conveying messages to different section
- Management of time table
- During this internship I have learned a lot of useful things which one need in a career.
- From this internship I have learned a lot of things. I have learned how to make an academic calendar. I have also learned how to deal the situations and how to make time table and after making how to implement.
- I learned how to deal with different types of people and how to work in a cooperative way within the whole staff. I learned how to create creativity and how to work in a talented way.
- I learned how to manage school activities. I also learned how to conduct morning assembly and manage students. I also learned how to conduct examinations and how to maintain the important documents how to work with a staff how to manage parents teacher meetings, and how to maintain discipline in a school.
- Internship programme plays a very important role in making the career of the student. It gives the practical knowledge. It helps the students to practically do the theoretical work.

During the internship period main responsibility is arrange and maintain the office documents and keeping record according their order. And type circulars for the teachers and parents. Making a time table of play group to class 4th for the new session is also my responsibility. Sometime art work is also my responsibility. But office documentation is my main responsibility.

Theme IV: Influence of Internship on career plans

This internship will help me in making and presenting myself as a good teacher. As I have learned many things from this internship. So, it will definitely influence my future plans.

Before the experience of internship I had plan to be a teacher in future but now my decision is changed now I want to go for administration work. My experience in school was so good and I have practice all the duties which I read before. To practice these duties was very interesting for me, there were some questions which always confused me about these duties but now I got answers of all those questions. I enjoy my internship a lot and I learn many things.

Internship will influence my career plans because I learn so many skills and responsibilities during the short term internship. I learn a lot about professional work and public dealings. It helps me to solve many questions which were in my mind before this short term internship. So I think the internship will influence my career plans. This internship have a great impact on my future carrier, first of all we have experience the role and responsibilities of teacher, one thing I must mention that during internship the main thing I learn is to be clam because for students teachers are role model. I learned how to decorate class I learn art work admin work. I learn how to become a good teacher.

This internship was very useful. It will be very fruitful for me in future because as a future teacher it will help me not to commit any mistakes and to perform duties very well. It will help me in long term internship. It will also help me in future as a teacher. It will help me in future if I do any job as a coordinator. It helped me to learn how to keep records in safe mode and how to manage activities and all work related to institute. It will be helpful for me in public dealing.

The internship activities that I carried out are correlated with our class room knowledge because all those activities are related to my profession all those activities are related to my classroom knowledge. I faced all what I learned during my seven semester so what I learned I experienced it practically during this internship.

Through this internship program professionalism is developed in me along with punctuality which was far lagging in me before this internship program and now I know how to deal with people and situation in the work place with peace and harmony. It has built a great confidence in me to deal with employees and teachers. Besides that it has made me a true leading teacher by teaching me inside outs of school through its administrative works and demanding tasks.

I think this internship will definitely help me in career planning. This internship is a kind of footpath for me through which I can make my future bright. Apart from my academic qualification now am able to induct classroom sessions as well as can make lesson plans. This internship will also provide me an opportunity in, my further to get a teaching job in any institution soon after the completion of my MA degree from Islamic university. Last but not least, i have learned a lot of new things from this internship which has improved my skills communication as well as public dealing skills. I gained skills form teachers how to manage classroom discipline and how to response in the class room, I also learnt how to use raw material in creative works.

Theme V: Correlation of Internship activities with classroom knowledge

Before doing this internship our teachers use to just give us examples related to this and we use to imagine. But now I have practically experienced every task. And this has become my skill.

The subjects which I studied in 2nd semester including Classroom assessment, School management and Educational psychology were too much related to my work. Before going to internship I already knew the school management and management of different activities.

The internship activities are correlated with my classroom activities because I have done all the work practically which I have read in books before. During this time my knowledge, experience and also my confidence level has increased. I have learnt many skills. Overall it was a golden opportunity to apply our theory knowledge and practice our skills which I read before. There was no single thing which I don't read or discuss in class. And now I can say that the internship activities are correlated with my classroom knowledge. I learn how to teach in certain conditions. I take different classes during this period so I learn how to teach and handle the students or satisfy your students.

Our teachers taught us these activities in the classroom at that time they all were in theoretical form but when I practically applied them in my professional life it became my skill. At first upon its offering I'd never realized that it is relevant to all the previous courses I've learned before but when once I've started to do it I went to know that, yes it is really relevant to

all the previous courses I've learned; but it is most relevant to the following courses in my program pedagogy:

- School Management.
- Classroom Assessment.
- School, Society and Teacher.
- Educational Psychology.
- Curriculum development.
- Introduction to Management.

Conclusion

It may be concluded from the data analysis that the internship was not just a placement but a pathway to their career as it helped them to develop a link between theory and transformed many misconceptions related to teaching and related works, their concepts became clear and vision was broadened. They had a deeper learning that challenged them to understand themselves, the school environment and their abilities in a better way. They narrated that the period was particularly glamorous and equally thrilling. They gained class room confidence & learnt the basic knowledge and skills of administration and performed duties like Updating of Time Table, Preparation of Date Sheet, Day Mistress Duty, Collection of Fee, and Parent Teacher Meeting, preparation of Question Papers of Final Term Exams, compilation of Final result and preparation of result cards. This Internship program was very informative and full of transformational experiences as it developed the professional connections and exposed Preservice teachers to experiences which have transformed their perception of local issues towards more holistic vision.

The internship experience provided the pre-service teachers with the greater understanding of career demands and qualifications. It allowed them to understand the connection between what they studied and how they can apply it in the world of work. Thus it enhances the knowledge and potential for reaching goals set in career. During this internship I have learned a lot of useful things which one need in a career.

From this internship I have learned a lot of things. I have learned how to make an academic calendar. I have also learned how to deal the situations and how to make time table and after making how to implement.

I learned how to deal with different types of people and how to work in a cooperative way within the whole staff. I learned how to create creativity and how to work in a talented way. I learned how to manage school activities. I also learned how to conduct assembly and manage students. I also learned how to conduct exams and how to maintain the important documents how to work with a staff how to manage teacher meetings, and how to maintain discipline in a school. Internship programme plays a very important role in making the career of the student. It gives the practical knowledge. It helps the students to practically do the theoretical work.

Recommendations

Internship is a golden opportunity to practice theory knowledge and gain experience I learn a lot from this internship. And I observe many things which I had never observed before. I was very keen to know about an organization's head's duties and it was a good opportunity to observe the principal's work and also perform some duties of principal as well. I observe the environment of the school it was great experience because I compare the environment and student's behaviors with my time at school. Now students are more confident and naughty. I also

observe the teachers they were also good but there were few teachers who don't give importance to students individual differences, they always remain in angry temper, teachers do not try to help students to overcome their weakness and enhance their abilities they just teach the lesson and This was the thing which was not good. In internship programme the best thing was it is completed before our midterm exams and we got a lot more time for our other subjects. In other hand internee have a so much work load or assignments that time it makes difficulties in our work.

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