

TEACHING MATHEMATICS METHODS COURSES TO PROSPECTIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS: FIVE YEARS OF REFLECTION

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In the last decade, researchers have shown a great deal of interest in the study of learning to teach prospective elementary school teachers. They have reported that there is often a conflict between what the university teacher educators want to teach in their methods courses and what prospective teachers want to learn (Katz & Raths, 1992; Nicol, 1999; Wineburg, 1991). Mathematics teacher educators usually want to engage prospective teachers in theory-based teaching approaches. Prospective teachers, on the other hand, usually want to be told "best practices" of teaching. These conflicts create dilemmas and complexities in classrooms. This presentation describes such a conflict that this author has consistently experienced in the teaching of mathematics methods courses to prospective elementary school teachers.

This study was carried out within a framework of case study research. The data for this study were collected from seven groups of elementary mathematics methods courses that I taught over a period of five years. In order to prepare this presentation I reviewed my course materials and analyzed them using a qualitative approach.

The data indicate that prospective teachers often wanted a collection of activities, lessons, and units in order to use them in their future classrooms. They wanted to make sure that I cover the curriculum by giving them enough activities from each content area. However, my feeling was that the carrying out of activities without proper philosophy is superficial and cannot get prospective teachers into inquiry and analysis. I wanted to cover only a few topics with appropriate theories and philosophies while prospective teachers wanted to cover more topics eliminating the time for theories. Basically I wanted to emphasize the depth and the prospective teachers wanted a breadth of activities.

References

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