Empirical Research on Professional Growth Value of Critical Events to Student Teachers

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Abstract. Critical events of the educational practice are functional events experienced by student teachers during the internship to have a great influence on their educational concepts and educational behaviors.[1] For the professional growth of student teachers, critical events play a profound and important role, specifically in optimizing professional reflection, strengthening professional cooperation, enriching professional knowledge, enhancing practical ability, and riching professional emotions, etc.. It is an effective attempt and favorable way to analyze the critical events during the internship period to improve the professional growth level of student teachers, and it is also a new path in the field of pre-service teacher education research.

Introduction

In recent years, it has become a new perspective on teachers’ training and teaching to concern about the critical events in teaching in the field of teacher education both at home and abroad. Obviously, the educational practice of student teachers is an essential part in the training of pre-service teachers. They must have experienced many of the critical events that have caused their happiness or confusion in participating in professional practice, which is possible to change or establish the direction of the individual development of student teachers and to have a decisive and lasting impact on their professional development.[2] In the process of experiencing the critical events, student teachers have factual cognition, judge the value, make professional decisions and perform actions. Meanwhile, they carry out reflection, implement self-evaluation, form the meaning construction and develop the practical wisdom after the critical events. As a result, critical events have a very profound and important value of their internship period and even the future professional growth. Thus the function of critical events is complex and sustainable, which is reflected in professional reflection, professional cooperation, professional knowledge, professional competence and professional emotion, etc. The cases cited in this article are derived from the record of the critical events of student teachers and the interviews with them.

Professional Growth Value of Critical Events to Student Teachers

To Optimize Professional Reflection and Deepen Self-Cognition

Critical events are the conclusions and summaries of the internship life experience of student teachers, which can make them get the thought and revelation in the cognition and judgment, inducing them to deeply reflect the facts and value of the critical events, thus to get a beneficial enlightenment. According to my study, student teachers participating in the recording of critical events are able to initiatively focus on the important events during their internship. In the record and reflection of the critical events, They can deeply analyze the events and influencing factors, as well as make the fact and value judgment to achieve the autonomy of the meaning of the events. In the record of critical events, student teachers’ cognition and thinking of the critical events are markedly critical, so they
have the cognitive conflict due to the attributes of the critical events and the results, which promotes them make choices conducive to their professional growth. In this process, student teachers can analyze the attributes of the events, construct personal experience, retrial the value standards, lead to professional decision and shape the subjective concept, which helps them better understand themselves in the comparative test, introspection and multiple evaluation.[3] Eventually, they optimize the career competency and professional structure, so as to obtain in-depth professional awareness and real self-cognition. One student teacher said the record of critical events during the internship had helped him conclude and reflect his internship life every day, and it was very meaningful for his education career in the future. Another said that the record of critical events had not only promoted his professional growth, but more importantly, had helped him understand and improved himself better. The above examples show that critical events have a long-term effect on the future professional development and sustainable development of student teachers by deepening the memory, enriching the internship experience, shaping the professional psychology and improving the professional emotions.

To Promote Interpersonal Communication and Strengthen Educational Cooperation

A critical event is not an abstract, simple event of a single principal element and an influencing factor, but an interactive event experienced by a student teacher as a participant or external subject. During the occurrence of the critical event, the student teacher experiences the interaction between self and the other, which is the main interaction between the student teacher and other characters such as the student, the instructor and the education manager, etc.[4] and constitutes the practice of communication among people.[5] In this process, student teachers need to form a reasonable interaction and communicative mechanism with others, obtaining personal experience under each other’s influence, and generating effective coordination strategies and interactive skills to build up a good interpersonal relationship. As a prerequisite, in the course of the occurrence of critical events and their follow-up effects, student teachers can communicate with each other in a meaningful way and form a favorable subjective cooperation. According to my study, with the accumulation of experience and the clear awareness of self-cognition, cooperation between the student teachers and various subjects has gradually walked from unfamiliar, simple, single-subject to communication, complex cross-subject cooperation. Meanwhile, the breadth and the depth of the cooperation continue to expand and extend. For example, one student teacher said that he had a very close contact and cooperation in teaching with his students and teachers during the internship period, and critical events happened in teaching and communicating with others were the valuable experience in his future teaching life. Another said that the record could help him better understand the students and reflect on his performance to do better next time, which also helped to understand and communicate with his instructor. Owing to this experience, student teachers can master the methods and techniques of cooperation, strengthen the awareness and attitude of cooperation, understand the value and significance of cooperation, and find a favorable and effective way of cooperation, thus to make their own cooperative ability and strategies to enhance.

To Enrich Professional Knowledge and Master Educational Strategies

Professional knowledge is one of the important indicators that reflects the professional accomplishment of student teachers, determining the internship performance of them. Teachers’ professional knowledge mainly takes the four aspects of educational theory knowledge, curriculum knowledge, subject knowledge and subject teaching knowledge as the core framework.[6] As the basis of professional accomplishment, professional knowledge potentially influences and constraints the teaching behaviors and of student teachers in their teaching practice. On the one hand, their mastery of the professional knowledge lies in the accumulation of university studies. On the other hand, it lies in the professional practice and individual learning methods during their internship, especially the procedural knowledge and strategic knowledge in the above four professional fields.
Through the analysis of the record of critical events, the professional knowledge of student teachers showed a significant phenomenon of expansion and the migration characteristics from static command to dynamic use of knowledge. One student teacher said that he had found the lack of knowledge in education management, psychology, subject and classroom teaching, and the critical events could help the specific use of the knowledge to better conclude and reflect, thus to increase the knowledge reserve. At the same time, student teachers explore a large amount of personal expertise to help the strategic knowledge and silence knowledge in the process of internalizing the significance of critical events. Although such knowledge cannot be directly cognized by student teachers, it still has the potential impact of guiding the teaching practice reflected in the subject teaching, classroom organization, teaching management, team activities and so on. In the record, another student teacher said that critical events had taught him to feel and appropriately regulate the atmosphere of the class. Particularly, he had gained the experience of the management of the classroom and the control of the class. With the enriching of various knowledge in the professional internship practice, student teachers have experienced the growth process from confusion, single method and dependence to standard, diverse methods and independence. Meanwhile, the increase of knowledge in various fields contributes to the formation of educational strategies, which shows the Matthew effect of mutually promoting between professional knowledge and educational strategies.

To Enhance Teaching Ability and Generate Psychological Adjustment

Classroom teaching is the central part of educational practice. By the analysis of the record in my study, it can be found that student teachers’ cognition, analysis, evaluation and reflection of critical events are very important to improve their teaching ability. In a number of critical events related to classroom teaching, the student teachers pay more attention to classroom teaching quality than teaching phenomenon, and concern more about personal teaching than the teaching situation of others. At the same time, they no longer worry too much about their teaching competencies, but focus on improving personal teaching ability. And in the classroom teaching, they endeavor to guide and inspire their students instead of constraints, and use multiple management strategies. Therefore, they eventually strengthen their own teaching practice ability in the reflection of lesson preparation, lectures, teaching design, classroom teaching and many other professional activities. What’s more, the improvement of practical ability can not only benefit from the formal training of student teachers during the internship, but also from the beneficial effects of a series of critical events through the specific occurrence mechanism to them. For example, one student teacher said critical events warned him what to do and what should not do, and helped find his shortcomings to make progress in the teaching skills. Accompanied by the accumulation of knowledge, the improvement of ability and the formation of strategies, student teachers can perform positive psychological adjustment according to the types and nature of critical events. With the rich content of internships and the rise of cognitive level, the student teachers continue to consolidate the existing level of psychological adjustment, and form new adjusting methods and strategies which helps to consolidate and generate their psychological adjustment, further instructing their professional practice from the aspects of acquiring knowledge, enhancing ability and professional reflection, etc.. Thus, in the implicit level and the explicit level, it has a potential impact on the long-term development of student teachers.

To Improve Professional Accomplishment and Shape Professional Norms

During the internship period, the critical events experienced by student teachers are personalized and diversified. In the process of internalizing the critical events, student teachers can get the influence and revelation of the value and the potential effect of the comprehensive promotion of their own professional aspects. One student teacher said recording critical events was necessary for his professional development. In fact, the perfection of professional performance is not only the improvement of knowledge, but also the teachers’ accomplishment. After all, teachers directly relate to the growth of students. In addition, after experiencing a large number of critical events, the student teachers significantly shape and enhance their career concepts, professional norms, professional
identity, professional ethics and other aspects. According to the study, student teachers can constantly reflect their own professional ideas and moral norms through the critical thinking of self-examination and self-evaluation before and after the critical events. In this process, they perfect and reconstruct their own professional ethics through the conflict and debugging between the personal professional standards and social professional norms, thus to get the harmonization and development of pursuing the personal career and social career. As one student teacher said in the record, one critical event told him the growth of students could not do without the influence of teachers, so he should be responsible for all the students in spite of his limited ability. It is the teacher’s responsibility and the expectation of the parents and the society to concern about every student and help them develop to the best. It can be found that the influence of these events has a long-term effect on student teachers to become high-quality, specialized and outstanding ones.

Conclusion

It is possible to reveal the influence mechanism and growth value of the critical events on student teachers by means of studying the critical events, which also provides the basis for the hierarchical structure and the internal process of student teachers’ professional development. Analysis of the critical events plays a guiding role in the practice supervision. On the one hand, the practice of pre-training should be refined to guide student teachers to master the response experience of critical events. On the other hand, cooperative teachers should give full play to help student teachers reflect and internalize the critical events, and promote their professional growth during the internship. At the same time, except for the natural occurrence of critical events, it is also necessary and feasible to initatively create different kinds of critical events to promote the professional growth of student teachers. For this purpose, the proper use of the positive function of critical events has already become an effective attempt and favorable way to comprehensively improve the professional growth of student teachers, which is also a new path in the pre-service teacher education research field in current years.

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