The Impact of a Simulated Teaching Intervention on Preservice Teachers' Sense of Professional Identity

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Abstract : This paper reports a study investigating the development and implementation of an online multi-session 'scenario-based learning' (SBL) program administered to preservice teachers in Australia. The transition from initial teacher education to the teaching profession can present numerous cognitive and psychological challenges for early career teachers. Therefore, the identification of additional supports, such as scenario-based learning, that can supplement existing teacher education programs may help preservice teachers to feel more confident and prepared for the realities and complexities of teaching. Scenario-based learning is grounded in situated learning theory which holds that learning is most powerful when it is embedded within its authentic context. SBL exposes participants to complex and realistic workplace situations in a supportive environment and has been used extensively to help prepare students in other professions, such as legal and medical education. However, comparatively limited attention has been paid to investigating the effects of SBL in teacher education. In the present study, the SBL intervention provided participants with the opportunity to virtually engage with school-based scenarios, reflect on how they might respond to a series of plausible response options, and receive real-time feedback from experienced educators. The development process involved several stages, including collaboration with experienced educators to determine the scenario content based on 'critical incidents' they had encountered during their teaching careers, the establishment of the scoring key, the development of the expert feedback, and an extensive review process to refine the program content. The 4-part SBL program focused on areas that can be challenging in the beginning stages of a teaching career, including managing student behaviour and workload, differentiating the curriculum, and building relationships with colleagues, parents, and the community. Results from prior studies implemented by the research group using a similar 4-part format have shown a statistically significant increase in preservice teachers' self-efficacy and classroom readiness from the pre-test to the final post-test. In the current research, professional teaching identity - incorporating self-efficacy, motivation, self-image, satisfaction, and commitment to teaching - was measured over six weeks at multiple time points: before, during, and after the 4-part scenario-based learning program. Analyses included latent growth curve modelling to assess the trajectory of change in the outcome variables throughout the intervention. The paper outlines (1) the theoretical underpinnings of SBL, (2) the development of the SBL program and methodology, and (3) the results from the study, including the impact of the SBL program on aspects of participating preservice teachers' professional identity. The study shows how SBL interventions can be implemented alongside the initial teacher education curriculum to help prepare preservice teachers for the transition from student to teacher.