

„Beliefs about civic education in the context of the practical semester“

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The discourse about teacher competence holds a dominant position in interdisciplinary and domain-specific contexts. A much-quoted conceptual source concerning teacher competence is the model of professional competence developed by the research program COACTIV (Kunter et al., 2011). This model evolves around the four main categories: knowledge, motivational orientation, self-regulative capabilities, and beliefs. Previous studies (i.e. Voss et al., 2011) support the central position of the latter by showing empirical evidence about the impact of teachers' beliefs both on teaching practice and student performance. The beliefs are to be understood as “psychologically-held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (Richardson, 1996: p. 103) and may vary concerning different subjects. While domain-specific studies have already been published (for example in the field of mathematics), civic education is lacking both quantitative and qualitative data in this respect.

Unlike students in other disciplines, students who train to become teachers already have experience in their field due to their own educational experiences. In their years as pupils, they already have formed their beliefs concerning teaching and learning. These beliefs, depending on their intensity, may appear as psychological “filters” (Reusser et al., 2011: p. 481), for the primarily theoretical impressions of university teacher-training. Thus, new information is gathered “against the background of the ‘old’ [previously-held] beliefs” (Reusser et al. 2011, p. 481). A change of beliefs is described as difficult, yet not impossible, if uncovered and reflected (Taibi 2013). The practical semester gives an opportunity for a practical approach on teaching while accompanying classes at university offer a possibility for guidance and reflection.

This leads to the following question: how does the teaching experience in civic education in the practical semester in school affect the learning teachers' domain-specific beliefs? The studies' purpose is to take a close look at the students' epistemological beliefs and their beliefs about teaching and learning concerning civic education. Its longitudinal setting allows a comparison of the uttered beliefs prior (I1) and subsequent (I2) to the practical semester. In addition, six of the eleven students participate in a complementing phase of two individual meetings during the practical semester. Based on the answers given in interview I1, the researcher develops individual sets of keywords. The keywords are supplemented or deducted, organized, and linked to each other individually by the student. The student is moreover asked to expound on his thoughts as part of his organizing procedure. This procedure is repeated after seven weeks. The developed arrangements are presented again in I2 where the students are asked to comment on possible differences in their arrangements. The collected data is qualitatively analysed and interpreted.

References

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