

Preparing student teachers for constructivist teaching about society in primary grades

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Abstract

The content of primary social studies could be described as cultural universals – domains of human existence that form part of everybody's experience. Despite that, children do need a skilled instruction helping them to elaborate these topics. We suppose that for the constructivist teachers, deep content knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge is necessary to elaborate and conceptualize children's experiences.

In this thesis, we wanted to learn more about the knowledge base of pre-service teachers. To explore the education students' content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge of social studies topics, we elicited students' concepts related to the topic of family using concept mapping. Then we performed the content analysis of the obtained concepts. We tried to determine whether pre-service teachers rely on their prior knowledge (including misconceptions) of family or whether they use the knowledge gained in social science classes at the high school or at our university. Students do not use their academic knowledge gained in social studies classes spontaneously, but they are able to do when prompted.

An important part of pedagogical content knowledge of a social studies teacher are the children's prior knowledge and children's conceptualisation of social phenomena. An one-to-one interview with primary age children was used to provide the prospective teachers with insights into the children's misconceptions and other cognitive processes. We suppose that the interviews and subsequent analysis of the interview transcripts can stimulate the pre-service teachers' reflection on content matter and its pedagogical transformation. We describe several forms of interviews focused on children's political and economic thinking. These interview formats proved useful for increasing students' questioning skills and their understanding of elementary school children's prior knowledge.

We use our findings to discuss the usefulness of scientific perspective in pre-service teacher training and in planning the elementary social science curriculum and instruction.