EDUCATIONAL STUDIES COLLABORATIVELY VIA DISTANCE AND CONTACT LEARNING

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Abstract

In Finland, the Pedagogical Studies for Vocational Teachers include 10 credits of studies in education. Half of our students complete them in connection with the pedagogical studies for teachers. The training consisting of distance education has been traditionally bought from the University. Some of the students have felt that studying education according to the university requirements has been hard for them. They would like a more practical approach to educational studies. Our students also come from a large area in northern Finland. Therefore, an opportunity for distance education is important for them. Tutoring has an important role in this implementation. To respond to these challenges, we have designed a more practical implementation of the educational studies, in which the students only have two face-to-face days. The new implementation was piloted in the autumn term 2012. The pilot succeeded very well. Students liked to study and learnt a lot about the different areas of education. The study was continued in the Spring 2014. Students of Education (19)made the same pre and post-surveys like in the Pilot. Research results were quite similar than in Pilot study. .

Keywords: Pedagogical studies, distance and contact learning, collaborative knowledge, tutoring.

Introduction

The studies in education provide the basis for a vocational teacher's pedagogical studies. Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of education is essential for the progress of later studies. Some of our students have felt that the university-provided educational studies are too theoretical, so they have wanted a more practical approach to the studies and an opportunity to work more together.

Underlying the pilot implementation was the idea of collaborative knowledge construction (Scardamalia & Bereiter 2003). By making use of the learning environment, the participants can simultaneously create messages, comment on each other's messages and organize the ideas and thoughts presented via messaging. In this way, the ideas and knowledge developed can be enhanced all the time. In practice, however, the study process does not proceed in a linear fashion, as it is an interactive whole that focuses on collaboration, networking and overlap in development. Dissemination, distribution and combination of knowledge and competence is essential to the process. (Valtion tiede- ja teknologianeuvosto, 2003). (5)

The term "knowledge building" is used commonly in the literature. We used the perspective that focuses on the production and continual improvement of ideas of value to a community (Scardamalia & Bereiter 2003)(3). A knowledge building community is similar to a research community where the members engage in progressive inquiry working at the edge of their understanding. Two key ideas are of particular importance: ideas are improvable through progressive discourse, and the members share collectively the responsibility for improving not only their own understanding but that of others as well. (See Game & Metcalfe 2009)(2).

The online environment is defined as an open learning environment. It is a pedagogically and technically appropriate environment for the student designed to be accessible on a computer network. Based on the model suggested by Anderson et. al. (2001)(1), Wang (2008)(4) has further specified and outlined four dimensions of the tutor/tutoring, dividing the responsibilities and roles in tutoring into pedagogical, social, managerial and technical tutoring. These forms of tutoring are all with in this pilot.

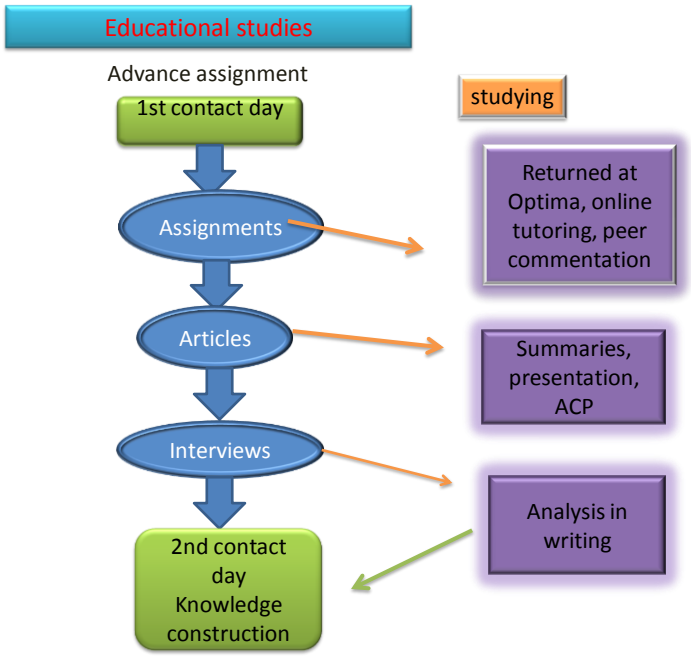

Figure 1. **The model for educational studies in the University of Applied Sciences.**

In this learning model contact teaching is only provided at the start and end of the studies. The studies take place mostly in the Optima online environment. Tutoring of the students occupies a central role in the model. Thirty students are accepted to study in the group.

Phase 1. The studies start with advance assignments. The purpose of these assignments is to orient the students to the studies to make them familiar with the central concepts of education. This is how they get prepared for the first contact teaching day.

Phase 2. The first contact teaching day. In this meeting, a knowledge base is built together for the studies in education. The main teaching methods are class discussions and group assignments led by the tutor teacher On the first contact day the students also get to know each other, and group building starts.

Phase 3. The assignments are similar. The students are given assignments in which the meaning is to get familiar with educational terminology and to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts. The work on the assignments takes place in small groups and they are published on the Optima platform.

Phase 4. In the assignment for this phase, the students familiarize themselves with educational research and present studies to each other. This takes place through social media, such as Adobe Connect. The assignment can also be completed in pairs. The tutor teacher is also present in the study presentations.

Phase 5. In this phase the students plan and conduct interviews. The small groups interview people in practical educational tasks, such as vocational teachers and other people working in the field of education.

Phase 6. The students convene for a joint closing seminar. The idea is to construct knowledge together. The duration of the studies was four and a half months.

Research questions

1. How did the students feel about the way the studies in education were organized?
2. How did the students feel about working in groups?
3. How did students feel about tutoring and feedback during the course?
4. Was the viewpoint of vocational training present in the studies?
5. Did the students think that the studies were practically oriented?
6. Did the students achieve the goals they had set for their studies in education?
7. How did the students' knowledge of education and its various areas develop during the studies as assessed by the students themselves?

Research samples and Collection of data

17 students from the School of Vocational Teacher Education participated in the educational studies pilot group. The students represented different vocational fields. In the Spring 2014 participated 19 students.

An electronic pre-survey questionnaire was constructed in the learning environment (Optima), and all the students responded to it. The same inquiry was also made at the end of the studies. The students responded to the written final inquiry when they were having their second face-to-face day at the end of the studies. Both inquiries used the Likert scale, with the pre and post-surveys using a 5-point scale and the final inquiry a 4-point scale.

Research results

As a whole, the students' feedback indicates that the study module pilot in educational studies was highly successful. Most of the students were very satisfied with the way the studies were organized (mean 3.83). The students estimated that the ratio between distance and face-to-face teaching was good (3.38). They also had positive feelings about Adobe Connect remote session. All the students considered that it was at least successful (3.57). Most concern was caused by technical problems, and not quite all of the students were able to attend the session.

The students were asked at both the start and end of the studies what they thought of their own knowledge of education and its development during the studies (knowledge of education, vocational education, educational psychology, sociology of education, educational research, and the field of work of vocational teachers). The students estimated that their knowledge had increased in every respect. Their knowledge had increased most in educational sociology and psychologysekä pilottiryhmällä että 2014 kevään opiskelijaryhmällä.. Their general knowledge of education had also increased. Meanwhile, their knowledge of the history and research of education had not quite increased as much as that of the other areas of education. Tulos oli sama kummankin ryhmän kohdalla. Ammattikasvatuksen kentän tuntemus oli alun alkaenkin korkealla tasolla, joten siinä tietämys lisääntyi opiskelun kuluessa vähiten. The means in the initial measurement ranged between 2.00 and 3.41 ja keväällä 2014 1.90 – 3.37., and in the final measurement between 3.41 and 4.24 ja keväällä 2014 3.37 – 4.00. The differences between the initial and final measurement were statistically highly significant in the various areas of education in the measurements 2012 and Measurement in the Spring 2014.

Discussion

I think this pilot also succeeded very well in combining distance and face-to-face teaching as well as group work. Although there were only two days of face-to-face sessions, the groups working between these sessions inspired a community spirit, supporting and guiding the students. The work in the groups had proceeded without any problems. It would thus appear that this mode of study enables joint construction of knowledge, with one of the essential elements being that the students are teaching each other. The task of coordinating the studies and the main responsibility for giving feedback lies with the teacher/tutor in charge of the study module. The measurement in the Spring 2014 shows, that the study model is effective.

References

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