Enhancing pre-service teachers’ socio-emotional competence

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A rapidly growing body of research reveals that teachers’ abilities to build positive relationships with students play a vital role in education. However, there is a lack of research regarding teacher education. This article aims to contribute by reporting from a project focusing on pre-service teachers’ relational competence. More specifically, it focuses on a phenomenon labelled socio-emotional competence. The first section discusses meanings of the concept, using a relational framework, and it highlights three aspects: i) the teacher acts sensitively and responsively; ii) the teacher is directly present to the student and manages feelings; and iii) the teacher confirms the student and supports the student’s emotional development. The next section discusses indications of improvement in pre-service teachers’ socio-emotional competence, based on data from an intervention study using digital video as the main method. The findings show that pre-service teachers’ relational understandings improved in several respects: they began to use a variety of words for specific emotions, to understand emotions as aspects of interaction, and to support their interpretations with behavioral cues. The concluding section considers why the intervention was successful and why socio-emotional competence seems to play a subordinate role in teacher education.

Keywords: relational pedagogy; teacher education; socio-emotional competence; relational competence; teacher-student relationship