

FACILITATING REFLECTION IN EDUCATION STUDIES: A CASE STUDY AMONG PRE SERVICE STUDENT TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores the facilitation of reflection in the teaching and learning of Education Studies among pre service student teachers. Data was collected through document analysis and reflective interviews. Four participants were selected based on opportunistic sampling for this study. Data was analyzed inductively for salient themes or issues by qualitative methods expounded by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (1980). Analysis of data shows that reflective journals, reflective grids and portfolios are written products of reflection while reflective interviews allow student teachers to reflect orally guided by lecturers. Analysis of reflective journals of student teachers yielded 7 main themes / issues, which are content knowledge, recommendations for improvement, problems faced, pedagogical knowledge, self awareness, survival skills and self ability. Analysis shows that 76% of student teachers' reflections were at the technical level of reflective thinking, 18.7% at the practical level and only 5.3% at the critical level. Most of the reflection writings were descriptive in nature and not at the critical level. Among the problems encountered in reflection were time constraint, over reliance on listing and general summaries. Findings of this case study show the potential of reflective journals and the portfolio as a means of promoting reflective thinking and the advantages of reflective interview in encouraging reflection verbally as well as reflecting at all three levels of reflectivity under the guidance of supervisors. This study also recommends that (i) time be made available for student teachers to reflect, (ii) the use of dialogue journals be encouraged and (iii) focusing on pedagogy as the main issue when reflecting on their experience or practice be encouraged.

INTRODUCTION

The teacher education programme aims at producing teachers who are:

noble in character, progressive and scientific in outlook, committed to uphold the aspirations of the nation, and cherishes the national cultural heritage, ensures the development of the individual and the preservation of a united, democratic,

progressive and disciplined society (The Philosophy of Teacher Education, 1982, p. 14).

Based on this philosophy, the Teacher Education Division (TED) continuously upgrades the ability of teachers through its curriculum changes. Among the changes are the use of thinking skills, knowledge based course work and the use of information technology. All these changes are geared towards “developing and inculcating a new positive culture besides motivating teachers to be creative and initiative” (Wan Zahid, 1993, p. 33).

Therefore, teacher training institutes are responsible to train teachers to be creative and full of initiative. One of the efforts is through reflective practice in the teacher training programme. The preparation of reflective teachers is an important theme in our teacher education. There is a need to produce teachers who are able to reflect about their behaviour and surroundings and make valid decisions (Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

Dewey (1933) raised questions about how to prepare reflective teachers who have the capability and orientation to make informed and intelligent decisions about what to do, when to do it and why it should be done (Richert, 1990). An important challenge for teacher educators interested in reflective approaches is identifying practical activities suited to the abilities and experiences of student teachers which expressly require reflection on their own learning process.

Student teachers must be taught to reflect upon their learning experiences and teacher educators need to encourage them to be reflective practitioners. The act of reflection can be strengthened by the use of strategies like journaling, structured interviews and conferencing to access the student teachers’ beliefs, thinking and decision-making processes (Simmons, 1990).

Teacher educators have responded to the call in preparing reflective teachers. However, they are concerned with how to prepare reflective teachers who are capable of making intelligent decisions. While ideas and ways of facilitating reflection have inspired substantial interest among teacher educators and researchers, yet literature includes little evidence on what facilitates reflection and affords scant attention to programmatic features designed to enhance reflectivity (Richert, 1990, p. 509).

Literature review shows that there are two constraints that make reflection a difficult task. In addition to the cognitive barrier that the ability to look back and learn from one’s experiences within a classroom environment is extremely complex (Shulman, 1987), there are organizational barriers that render reflection difficult.

Research shows that student teachers’ lack of time (Boon, 2002; Richert, 1990); the lack of structured opportunities to reflect (Boon, 2002) and the demanding workloads of teacher educators (Zeichner & Liston, 1987) have hindered facilitation of reflection among student teachers.

Review of literature shows that student teachers face problems in writing reflective statements (Clarke, 1995). They encountered difficulty in expressing their feelings and opinions in their reflective writings. They write without any specific focus and many of the writings are not reflective. Researchers on reflective practice opined that many journal entries often displayed only reflection at the technical and practical level (Boon, 2002).

To better equip student teachers, reflective thinking must become an integral component in the teaching process. It has become evident that student teachers must be stimulated to become reflective thinkers. Thus, this study explored some of the activities carried out during the teaching-learning of Education Studies programme for reflective practices. In addition, the researchers identified the issues raised in their reflection, problems encountered in the process of journaling and the levels of reflection exhibited by the student teachers based on Van Manen's (1977) Levels of Reflective Thinking.

This qualitative study therefore addresses the issue of facilitating reflection among student teachers in Education Studies programme. It also focuses on the activities used to facilitate reflection, the issues raised in their reflection and the levels of reflectivity.

REFLECTION AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflection is a process which goes through a cycle of experiencing reflecting, learning and planning. It is purposeful and it is done in order to acquire insights and so bring about improvement in aspects of professional practice. According to Dewey (1933), "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends constitutes reflective thought" (p. 9).

Reflection is also defined as a way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make rational choices (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). According to them, the reflective process include:

- (a) responding to a dilemma by recognizing both the similarities to other situations and the unique qualities of the particular situation
- (b) framing and reframing the dilemma
- (c) experimenting with the dilemma to discover the consequences and implications of various solutions
- (d) examining the intended and unintended consequences of an implemented solution and evaluating the solution by determining whether the consequences are desirable or not.

Kitchener and King (1982) indicate that students must also develop the ability to view situations from multiple perspectives as well as, the ability to search for alternative explanation.

The student teachers' reflection encompasses three elements, that is, cognitive element, critical element and teachers' narratives (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). The cognitive element describes how teachers process information and make decisions. It focuses on how teachers use knowledge in their planning and decision making. The critical element focuses on the substance that drives the thinking – experiences, goals, values and social implications. The final element of reflection, teachers' narratives refers to teachers' own interpretations of the events that occur within their particular contexts. Such narratives can be a powerful force in heightening teachers' awareness of their own professional reasoning

LEVELS OF REFLECTION

Van Manen (1977) developed a framework to determine the different categories of reflectivity. Zeichner and Liston (1987) adapted this framework and more recently Boon (2002), Pultorak (1993) and Wong (2000) used it for categorizing levels of reflective thought in their respective studies. There are three levels of reflectivity namely, technical rationality, practical action and critical reflection. The lowest level of reflectivity, that is technical rationality focuses on classroom competency and effectiveness demonstrated by measurable outcomes. This level is a reflection of an event relying on personal experience and/or observation without due regard for a system or theory and is often not viewed as problematic. For instance, a teacher may choose a particular room arrangement to maintain control, without consideration of the other possible effects.

At the second level, practical action, the teacher goes beyond technical rationality and becomes concerned with clarifying the assumptions and predispositions underlying competing pedagogical goals and with assessing the educational consequences towards which a teaching action leads (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). This category is a reflection of an event relying on personal experience and / or theory and is often viewed as problematic, but commonly with a personal bias.

Critical reflection, the third level, incorporates moral and ethical criteria such as whether important human needs are being met into the discourse about practical actions. At this level, educators are concerned with worth of knowledge and the social circumstances useful to students without distortions of personal bias. This level is specifically viewed as reflection of an event with open-mindedness including moral and / or ethical considerations (Pultorak, 1993). For example, the teacher may choose a seating arrangement that facilitates cooperative learning in the hope of fostering a more equitable and accepting society.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND JOURNAL WRITING

Recent researches suggest that meaningful reflection requires keen observation and reasoned analysis, as well as a view of knowledge as problematic and socially constructed rather than certain (Schon, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

A journal is a comprehensive and systematic attempt at writing to clarify ideas and experiences; it is a document written with the intent to return to it, and to learn through interpretation of the writing (Holly & McLoughlin, 1989).

Journal writing as a way of stimulating reflective writing has been widely used in teacher training especially in United States of America (Schon, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Literature review shows that journal writing is one of the best strategies in creating opportunities for student teachers to practice reflective investigation and self-assessment on teaching-learning issues.

Journal writing is a means to overcome any negative experiences in student teaching and other practicum settings. Journals allow the learner to reconstruct experience from practice and examine it in fresh ways by attending to features of a situation previously ignored (Grimmett, Erickson, MacKinnon & Riecken, 1990).

Hall and Bowman (1989) found that journals are most useful and informative and that predominant issues raised are socialization and professional growth. Issues such as pedagogical knowledge, problems encountered, guidance, new knowledge, individual effort and survival skills are also among the salient issues raised by student teachers in doing their coursework (Boon, 2002).

Numerous researchers opine that journals can be a very effective means of promoting and learning reflection among prospective teachers (Francis, 1995; Garmon, 1998). Similarly, Hoover (1994) concluded that written reflection is most effective for prospective teachers when it is given appropriate direction or focus.

Porter et al. (1990) discuss the use of journals by teacher-in-preparation to document their reactions to reading materials, lectures, seminars and so forth in their teacher preparation courses. Based on their findings, they conclude that the journal encourages students to learn beyond the course content as well as to link information to theories and knowledge beyond the requirement of the assignment and the course. In doing so, the journal teaches them to develop as professionals by working to integrate new ideas with existing knowledge and sharing them in the process.

Garmon (1998) found that journals can help instructors get to know and understand their student teachers better. Information from the journals assisted instructors in planning lessons. Garmon also found two limitations to journal writing. The limitations were that they can be very time-consuming for the

instructors and may not be equally effective with all students because students differ in their ability and willingness to write reflectively.

Research on journal writing supports the value of journals as a vehicle that promotes and documents reflective thinking (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Gipes & Richards, 1990; Yinger & Clark, 1981). Hatton and Smith (1995) suggest that journal or diary writing may by nature allow more opportunities for reflection.

Some studies suggest that teachers can reflect and be helped to learn the value of reflection in teaching and learning (Pultorak, 1993). Specific methods for encouraging reflective practice among teachers include reflective journals, reflective interviews and peer observation conferences (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991; Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

Research findings show that journals chronicled events, thoughts and feelings. Teachers tend to write on their teaching, thoughts and feelings, and their friends etc. As they review what they have written, they see patterns on their own and they connect events and circumstances, thus becoming more aware of how their moods influence their behavior. Findings show that the themes that emerge from teachers' journals include teacher isolation (physical, psychological, intellectual and social isolation); self image and discrepancies between roles, responsibilities, power and control and support (Holly & Mcloughlin, 1989).

THE CASE STUDY

The qualitative case study research method is used to collect data. It is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or a social unit. The case study method (Stake, 1995) is the most appropriate method to explore and narrate the student teachers' experiences in the teaching and learning of Education Studies in the real context.

The case study approach aims to understand the real situations, social realities and the perceptions of the student teachers without being hindered by formal measurement or questions determined earlier (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 78). Thus, this study reports episodes documented in their journals as representative of student teachers' feelings, what they know and what are their concerns, beliefs, perception and understanding of Education Studies. This clearly shows that case study is strong in reality (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1980, p. 59), a characteristic and strength of case study as compared to other methodologies.

Qualitative inquiry focuses in depth on relatively small samples and purposefully so to obtain information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). According to him:

There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done with available time and resources (p. 184).

In view of this, four student teachers from the post-graduate group were selected for this study. The collection of data was stopped once no new information was obtained.

Documents collected were also weekly journals which included student teachers' reactions to emergent issues related to the teaching–learning of Education Studies, reflective grids and portfolios. The journals or reflective writings collected were analyzed to obtain student teachers' thoughts on the teaching and learning of Education Studies. Portfolios collected were used to validate data collected by other means. Evidences from documents enabled the researchers to compare information collected besides clarifying differences that arose. With this, document evidences assisted the researchers in triangulating data in this case study.

Reflective interviews were also conducted with the participants from time to time throughout the research. It explored the facilitation of reflection in the teaching and learning of Education Studies. It was conducted informally to enable participants to raise their opinions freely from their own perspectives. It also occurred after the lesson when the researchers needed more information on aspects not clearly understood by the researchers.

Questions were open-ended and not structured. It depended on the context, the aspects needed to be known, particular participants and their feelings. In this case study, an interview protocol was used. It was only a framework where the researchers formulated questions or issues that needed to be explored. It ensured that all major issues were not missed out.

In qualitative studies, data collection and analysis are simultaneous activities. Analysis began with the first document read and first reflective interview conducted. Emerging insights and tentative hypotheses lead to the refinement or reformulation of one's questions. Throughout the data collection, comparison and analysis of data lead to categories and new themes. In addition, themes that arose changed and were reformulated again throughout the analysis. It helped the researchers focus on data collection so that only relevant data was given due attention and explored in depth.

The next step consisted of data reduction, data display, drawing conclusion and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Data reduction is a process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions. Data reduction occurred continuously throughout the data collection. As data collection proceeded, further episodes of data reduction occurred that is, writing summaries, coding, teasing out themes, making clusters, before conclusions were drawn.

In this study, the researchers selected issues / themes related to facilitation of reflection in the teaching and learning of Education Studies. Among the issues that arose were understanding of content knowledge, teaching methods, materials / aids, awareness, ability, problems faced, pedagogical knowledge

etc. The clustering of sub themes into main themes was done throughout the analysis of data.

Throughout data analysis, all data coded were reexamined to ensure that any data missed out got categorized into existing themes or new themes. When all coding had been completed, the researchers did frequency count and calculation of percentages for issues raised by participants in the reflective journals. In addition, the researchers calculated the frequency and percentage of the level of reflective thinking of the participants.

FINDINGS OF CASE STUDY

Types of activities that facilitate reflection

Addressing the issue of facilitating reflection among pre service student teachers in Education Studies, it is found that reflective journals and reflective grids are written products of reflection while the reflective interviews are orally guided form of reflection. Structured reflective journals written weekly consist of statements on the previous week's experiences on the entire teaching and learning process.

Reflective journals clarify and extend student teachers' thoughts and concerns. Journals provide lecturers with a means of consistently supporting student teachers' inquiry into their development as learners. As Spark-Langer and Colton (1991) state, reflection in narrative form prepares student teacher who will have the skill to analyze what they experience. It provides a rich understanding of what takes place in their minds and encourages increasing awareness and self assessment of their beliefs throughout the course.

Reflective interviews carried out from time to time are found to be directed at reflecting on a broader scope. It centers on discussion on student teachers' experiences followed by specific elements. Reflective interviews are found to encourage reflection about the student teachers' decisions on the teaching-learning situation. Conferencing with student teachers is found to be able to direct student teachers into reflecting on a variety of teaching components (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Open-ended questions will encourage reflection about the student teacher's decisions and how it affects them.

It is also found that student teachers tend to reflect at all three levels of reflective thinking because the researchers provided a comfortable setting and engaged them in discussion by posing open-ended questions to enable them to clarify responsibilities and engage in dialogue with the researchers.

This finding is supported by Pultorak (1993) who found that there appear to be a growth in the breadth and depth of responses to reflective questions. Most of the participants, according to Pultorak provide reflective responses paralleling the three levels of reflective thinking.

Reflective interview is the only procedure that includes guidance during actual reflection. Student teachers respond verbally to questions regarding their experiences, giving descriptive feedback on lesson quality and on prescribed focuses that determine areas needing improvement.

Issues raised in the Reflective Journals

The experiences undergone as depicted in the reflective journals will open the eyes of lecturers and give them an opportunity to examine the “voices” of the student teachers.

A total of 43 reflective journals were analyzed in this case study. Themes or issues raised by student teachers are discussed according to 7 main categories. They are, content knowledge, recommendations for improvement, pedagogical knowledge, problems faced, survival skills, self awareness and self ability.

(a) Content Knowledge

All participants discussed issues related to this category. It shows the focus of student teachers’ thoughts on content / subject matter during the teaching and learning experience. This is in line with Richert’s (1987) finding where student teachers were found to pay attention to content knowledge in their reflective writing during portfolio assignment.

Issues raised in this category comprise of psychological variables, teaching and learning theories, philosophy of Education etc. It shows the importance of content in equipping student teachers for their future teaching. Education Studies help equip student teachers with comprehensive content knowledge needed for future application in the classroom.

(b) Recommendations for Improvement

All student teachers raised issues related to this category. In this analysis of reflective journals, participants consistently identified aspects like more group work discussion, more examples related to real life, use of a variety of teaching aids and debates as means to enhance critical thinking.

Findings show that student teachers yearn for improvement and suggest that lecturers should be more student-centered, thereby giving them more room to think creatively and critically. This is in line with Collier’s (1999) call that multiple and varied opportunities be given to encourage reflection of at least two levels of reflectivity.

(c) Pedagogical Knowledge

Pedagogical knowledge on theories and principles of teaching and learning, approaches, strategies and knowledge on student teachers and classroom management are among issues raised. Issues commonly raised by participants

in this category are teaching approaches, teaching aids and steps in developing a lesson. This supports the view by McNamara (1990) and Richert (1987) that student teachers have to be encouraged to reflect on the above aspects because they need to focus on instructional content and analyse the effectiveness in dissemination of information or input to students.

Focus on pedagogical knowledge is invaluable in structuring reflective thinking of student teachers during practical teaching because it prepares a framework for them to improve on the content knowledge, teaching aids and strategies in their future teaching.

(d) Problems Faced

Issues in this category are raised by all participants in their reflective journals. The most common problems raised are time constraint in writing journals, lack of understanding of terms, and too much input given at one time. This is in line with Clarke's (1995) finding that time factor seems to be the stumbling block to reflection. As McNamara (1990) stressed, it is essential that adequate time be set aside for reflection and that more time be given to student teachers to assimilate what is being disseminated. New terms introduced need to be dwelled in greater depth by lecturers so that student teachers can have clearer insights into the understanding of educational terms. Student teachers need to be involved in group work activities as experiential learning will enable them to better understand the topics discussed. Teaching approaches should also be more student-centered as suggested by the student teachers.

(e) Self Awareness

Participants become aware of many aspects in Education Studies and new experiences in handling students in schools. Indeed, in attending Education Studies, student teachers have gained new experiences and found new perspectives relating to the experiences. This study also shows a change in understanding of content knowledge and the realization of the importance of topics in Education Studies amongst the student teachers.

This study also showed a change in student teachers' attitudes and values regarding the teaching-learning of Education Studies in addition to an increase of commitment and responsibility in attending Education Studies. They are able to apply what they learned in their practicum.

Like Shulman's (1987) study, this study finds that student teachers have achieved awareness through experiential learning. Even though Shulman stresses that new understanding may not be achieved automatically, this study shows all participants achieved awareness / new understanding after their reflection on their experiences.

Facilitating student teachers to reflect has given student teachers opportunities to dwell in depth on content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in addition to giving them new experiences in the teaching and learning of Education Studies for future applications.

(f) Survival Skills

This aspect remains at the lower end of categories ranked. Majority of participants concentrate on the achievement of goals in Education Studies. Even though participants face conflicts and problems in the teaching and learning process, they accepted responsibilities and approached the Education Studies course as a challenge and an opportunity to acquire the theories and principles of the teaching-learning process. They also showed their skills in managing time as beginning teachers later.

This study shows that student teachers are aware of time management skills and the need to be alert when attending Education Studies.

(g) Self Ability

Participants question their ability through their own self assessment. They discuss with friends topics which they lack understanding in and they see their peers as a source for discussing their teaching and learning problems. Findings show that they seldom reflect on comments by lecturers as a base to question their ability. This is supported by similar findings in Boon (2002) and Wong (2000). However, reflection on one's ability based on the comments of more experienced people will provide a solid foundation to think critically and evaluate their ability objectively.

Levels of Reflective Thinking

This study shows that 76% of reflective writings are at the technical level, followed by 18.7% practical level and only 5.3% at the critical level. All participants are at the technical level and this mean that many student teachers think reactively through their descriptive writing. This finding is supported by Collier (1999) and Wong (2000) who found that student teachers usually reflect at the technical level and whose writings are descriptive in nature. This maybe due to the fact that student teachers are more committed to goal achievement rather that thinking about the moral, ethical and professional action as posited by Van Manen (1977).

Referring to the frequency of critical thinking among the participants, two participants are more critical than the others. Both of them seem more committed to the teaching profession and they are more proactive as they are able to combine intuitive, rationality and objectivity in their reflection. They demonstrate an open-minded approach to their experiences. This supports the views of Van Manen (1977) which states that "... teachers who reflect critically tries to incorporate the moral, ethical and professional action criteria" (p. 277).

Two participants produce more reflective writings at the practical level than the others. These two participants focus more on aspects that relate theory and practice of what they have learned. Both of them regarded the teaching and learning of Education Studies as a chance to acquire learning through experiences in exploring a variety of theories of teaching and learning before they can apply them in the school.

On the whole, the participants are not that reflective and most of them produce journals that are diary-like and descriptive in nature. One of the reasons being student teachers lacked the time to reflect and this is supported by Dollase (1996). In addition, Boon (2002), Pultorak (1993) and Richert (1990) found that student teachers could not achieve the critical level of reflective thinking because of a lack of guidance by the supervisors. Feedback on their reflection should be given to the student teachers immediately and guidance given to enhance their level of reflectivity.

Problems faced in reflection

Time factor is raised by all the participants as one of the main problems faced when reflecting and writing the journals. Though student teachers may face time constraint they admit that they lacked time management skills and were fond of procrastinating work till the last minute.

While it is important to provide sufficient time for student teachers to reflect, allocating time for and of itself will not necessarily ensure that student teachers are reflective (Clarke, 1995).

Another problem encountered as student teachers moved towards reflection is over reliance on listing and a set format. This does not encourage reflection and listing of the same routine provides a way of fulfilling the task without offering much of one's own opinion. This aspect has to be taken seriously so as to avoid a stereotyped form of reflection and a low level of reflectivity.

Findings show that towards the end of the course, the reflection undergoes some modifications and are presented as general summaries, with no clear critical development and depth. There is not much supporting detail as confirmed by Jarvis (1992).

In summary, some of the problems faced in reflection are time constrain, over reliance on listing and general summaries which can be solved if we engage in conferencing with student teachers and if lecturers help them see alternative interpretations. Time management skills will further help student teachers to plan early and thus have sufficient time to reflect.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF CASE STUDY

Journal writing as a vehicle for reflective writing

Keeping a journal which includes entries provides a rich base for reconstructing experiences. The process of writing, whether thinking on paper or creating, is dialectical. Ideas raised provide an avenue for reaction and as one reacts, other information will form and coalesce, thus making us understand how we know, think and what we sensed we know.

Reflecting on experience through journal writing can provide a rich, comprehensive and evolving data base for future practice. It also provides insights and understanding which will further help improve quality of work. In addition, journal writing provides an avenue for on-going evaluation for individuals and helps us to be aware of our own ideas, questions and challenges, thus enriching our practice.

Monitoring and improving Levels of Reflectivity

One way of improving the level of reflectivity is to use a framework which focuses on aspects or categories of the Education Studies and the Van Manen's (1977) Level of Reflective Thinking as checklists during supervisor / lecturer- student conferences. This is to ensure that issues discussed during and after the conference can be varied and the level of reflection improved. The lecturer can move the student teachers' thoughts from the technical level to the practical and eventually to the critical level through guidance and questions posed to them.

Another way is to have more reflective interviews during conferences or tutorials so that student teachers can reflect verbally guided by lecturers. The lecturer will act as a leader in helping student teachers reflect. Exercises through a structural question technique can help student teachers become reflective practitioners. Their basic knowledge will be explored through discussion and student teachers can then relate theory and practice. Student teachers can try to reflect at all three levels of reflection during the interviews as indicated in this study. Student teachers who faced problems in writing could reflect orally. This is in line with findings of Pape and Kelly (1990) and Pultorak (1993) where reflective thinking at the critical level is clearer during reflective interviews as compared to reflective writing.

Dialogue journal, that Staton (1988) defines as "the use of a log for the purpose of carrying out a written conversation between two persons on a regular, continuous basis" (p. 4), can be an effective means of promoting reflection. Kottkamp (1990, p. 185) has argued that the act of writing is itself a reflective activity because we often pause, cycle back, reread and rethink the very descriptions and ideas we are in the process of formulating and inscribing.

Numerous authors have found that the use of journals is a means of promoting reflection and learning (Francis, 1995). However, Hoover (1994) concluded that written reflection is effective if there is direction or focus. Thus, Hoover recommended dialogue journal as a means of providing this direction. In addition, dialogue journal can help lecturers get to know and understand their student teachers better, thus enabling them to adapt their instruction to meet student teachers' needs. It has provided individualized instruction and work with each student teacher's zone of proximal development (Garmon, 1998).

Focus on Pedagogy

Pedagogy lies at the heart of the teachers' role and a focus on it is valuable for structuring student teacher's reflective thinking about practice because it provides a rigorous framework within which to address questions on subject matter, strategies of teaching, teaching aids and tasks set to shape learning. This is precisely the sort of issue which student teachers should be encouraged to reflect upon since it requires them to focus on the content of instruction and assess how effective they are in explaining content to children (McNamara, 1990).

CONCLUSION

If reflection is to be taken seriously, it is important to provide opportunities, both structured and unstructured, for student teachers to reflect on their practice. It is also essential that adequate time is set aside for student teachers to reflect on their own practice and experience. According to McNamara (1990), if student teachers are to be encouraged to be reflective practitioner, they must be given adequate time to develop their reflective skills and circumstances must be organized so as to promote reflective thinking.

Teacher Education Programmes should prepare student teachers to reflect on their practice from a broader context. It should promote awareness amongst student teachers that as life long learners they should acknowledge, hear and listen to their own voice (Belenky et al., 1986) and begin to value the process of written and oral reflection.

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