

A Study of Reflective Journals Written by Student-teachers during School Internship Programme

MEENA SEHRAWAT* AND M.M. ROY**

Abstract

The main purpose of reflection is to make sure that all students learn more effectively and meaningfully. Reflective practice makes you accountable for yourself and for the progress of your students. By self-assessing strengths and weaknesses in your teaching, you can explore the factors that hamper your teaching-learning process and the areas where development might be needed.

In SCERT, Delhi D.El.Ed course student-teachers write their reflective journal for 40 days per year during the school internship programme as a part of practicum. The present study focuses on the reflective thinking, which student-teachers do before, during and after the teaching-learning process along with the self-assessment to improve their practices. All 26 student-teachers of two investigators were oriented about writing reflective journals but only four student-teachers were randomly selected as sample. Content analysis of the reflective journals written by the student-teachers showed various reflective aspects such as student-teacher relationship, teaching-learning process, self-assessment, teachers' responsibility— codes and conducts and classroom environment.

* Assistant Professor, DIET, Ghumenhera

** Assistant Professor, DIET, Ghumenhera

INTRODUCTION

Reflection sharpens our mental process. It is the interpretation of what is going on between learning and thinking. Reflection is a systematic process of reviewing, this allows teachers to make links from one experience to the next, making sure that students make maximum learning progress. The reflective journals help to keep records of one's thoughts and ideas. Dewey (1933) stated that reflective thinking is "the active, persistent, and careful consideration of one's belief or a form of knowledge that support it and the further conclusions to which it ends." Reflective writing is a way of thinking to explore learning and to achieve clarity and better understanding of what have been learned. This process encourages working with others as one can share best practice and ask others for support. The main purpose of reflection is to make sure that all students learn more effectively and meaningfully as learning can be tailored to them. Reflective practice helps teacher to understand how students learn and what can be the best ways to teach them effectively.

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2010) has focused on the need of reflective practice. By reflecting on one's teaching, one can identify the barriers to learning that students may have. Being reflective also helps teacher to have a wider range of skills by teaching students in new ways and develop abilities to

solve problems. It allows you to take time to critically look at your teaching and improve or appreciate your own teaching strategies. Critical reflection is the most important characteristics of reflective practitioners. Until and unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they found themselves in unexamined judgments, assumptions, expectations and interpretations, (Larrivee, 2000).

Reflective practice is a tool for self-assessment, which provides platform to improve your teaching by identifying your strengths and weakness in your teaching. Giroux (1988) describes teachers as transformative intellectuals who combine their reflection and practice to teach their students. Against the "banking education," where student is supposed to be the receiver of knowledge given by the teacher, education should develop student's self-reflection, and critical faculty. Therefore, it is the need of the hour for teacher-education programmers' to incorporate critical reflection in their curricula at all levels.

Reflection allows the teacher to understand one may have helped others to achieve and what this looks like in a practical learning environment? By asking students to share their thoughts, ideas and feelings on their learning, plays an active part in the learning process. This allows them to take ownership of their learning as self-aware and responsible students and also work with you and give feedback. Reflective

practice gives you the space to adapt lessons that suit your classes. Teacher can evolve new strategies and experiment these ideas and approaches to teaching-learning process to cater maximum number of students' success.

With such new ideas and experimenting with new approaches, students gain a richer learning experience. They will think more critically, imaginatively, creatively and resourcefully and be ready to adapt to new ways and methods of thinking and learning. Not only the prospective teachers but also even the practicing teachers should continually progress through the levels of reflective thinking with their day-to-day practices. As is the case with all skills, reflection too is learnt and flourished with active efforts made on the part of the practitioner. Bhogayata (2000) suggests, "Reflective practice is required as the future teachers should take reflective decision, set their goals, plan, implement and monitor their action; self-evaluate their results and reflect on their own professional thinking and growth."

Critical reflection has a positive impact on the teaching-learning process. Researches in this area had shown that self-reflection is very beneficial practice for teachers that promotes critical understanding and development of their professional practice (Husu et al., 2008, Ghaye, 2000).

When a teacher gives preferences to students' strengths and weaknesses, then learning is personalised more to their needs. Such teachers become more curious and well equipped to explore more deeply for their students. This whole process of critical reflection helps teacher to create an environment, which centers on the learner. This environment will support both of them to become more engaged, confident, innovative and responsible. The day you start the reflective process, your quality of teaching-learning will improve automatically. You will take into account various learning styles, the individual needs of learners, and plan new lessons accordingly based on these reflections. Therefore, when a reflective teacher focuses on the learning process, the learning outcomes and results of the learners are set by default to improve.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are rather limited researches based on reflective journals of student-teachers in India, how they reflect on their learning when involved in School Internship Programme. Writing a reflective journal is a part of D.El.Ed curriculum of SCERT, Delhi. As a part of practicum, student-teachers write their reflective journal for 40 days per year during the School Internship Programme.

The present study focuses on the reflective thinking, which student-teachers do before, during

and after the teaching-learning process along with the self-assessment to improve their practices. Thus, the present study can be helpful for the student-teachers, teacher educators and practicing teachers of schools to improve their practice of teaching. In the light of above discussion, the following title was finalised.

OBJECTIVES

Following objectives were framed for the above study—

1. To study the reflective journals written by the student-teachers in School Internship Programme.
2. To analyse the reflective journals written by the student-teachers with respect to the pre, during and post teaching-learning process in School Internship Programme.

METHODOLOGY

Two investigators were having 26 student-teachers out of which 12 were from first year and 14 were from second year. Investigators randomly selected 4 student-teachers, two student-teachers each from first and second year respectively. Therefore, only 4 student-teachers were selected as sample. However, before going to School Internship Programme, all the student-teachers were oriented about writing reflective journals, and they were asked to follow the following pattern while writing the journal.

1. Why and what to teach?
2. How to teach?

3. To what extent was I successful in achieving the goals?

4. What was my learning?

Our student-teachers did School Internship Programme for 40 days in schools. From the very first day, they started writing their experiences of the school in their reflective journals. Every day they reflected upon the given pattern. The supervisor also gave them the feedback to improve their writing by conducting discussions during pre, during and post teaching learning process. Their reflected journals were collected after 40 days of School Internship Programme.

DATA ANALYSIS

Investigators used inductive analysis and synthesis method for the data analysis. This involved the process of data analysis by the data organisation, filtering of data, and formation of codes, constructing themes based on codes and followed by drawing of conclusions from the data.

Tallies of responses on reflective journals of the student-teachers were also marked category wise. Tallies were changed into frequencies and percentages. Various reflections of trainees were identified and classified into given below categories.

1. Student-teacher relationship,
2. Teaching-learning process
3. Self-assessment
4. Teachers' responsibility— codes and conducts.
5. Classroom environment.

FINDINGS

Reflective Journals Written by Student-teachers

were uncomfortable with me. Then I asked them to introduce themselves, and for that I gave them a structure such as —

Table 1
Reflective Journals Written by the Student-teachers

S.No.	Reflective Aspects	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Student-teacher relationship	23	8.39
2.	Teaching-learning process	71	25.91
3.	Self-assessment	64	23.35
4.	Teachers’ responsibility codes and conducts	68	24.33
5.	Classroom environment	48	17.51
6.	Total	274	

The above table clearly shows that the 25.91 per cent, 24.33 per cent and 23.35 per cent of student-teachers reflected upon teaching-learning process, teachers responsibilities/ teachers ethics and self-assessment respectively followed by classroom environment 17.51 per cent and student-teacher relationship 8.39 per cent.

Student-teacher Relationship

With respect to the student-teacher relationship result, it was found that all the student-teachers were excited to be a teacher in the internship programme especially first year students, and they were also not confident regarding the rapport with their students.

According to student-teacher 1(ST-1), developing a connect with the students is the most important step in the teaching-learning process. ST-1: “Introduced myself to the student’s first but, still students

I am _____ (name).
I live at _____.
My hobbies are _____.”

ST-3: “I talked and interacted with them in a very polite and humble way, which helped me in my teaching.”

ST-2: explained that dialogue and sharing with the students during the pre-teaching phase was most important to initiate the teaching-learning process. She felt more connected through the dialogue.

ST-2: “We started talking to each other”.

During the course of the internship programme student-teachers felt that their students were eagerly waiting for them and actively participated by asking questions, talking to us, arranging materials on the desk for activity and ready with the extended work given in the previous

class. A democratic classroom environment provides students a room for discussion and dialogue to nurture the positive interpersonal relationships among students. Student-teachers also observed that majority of students preferred to work alone or with their bench mates.

According to ST-4: "I usually prefer group work and for this I rotated all the students during the group work, sometimes using the number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5..., sometimes on the basis of the month/day on which they were born, etc."

Teaching-learning Process

Informal setting, i.e., in schools we can say that learning can be through teaching, and this teaching process creates an arrangement of environment whereby students can interact to learn. In a nutshell the aim of the process of teaching-learning is to facilitate the learner to create the knowledge and acquire the necessary skills, attitudes, values and behaviour. In the early phase of internship programme, student-teachers were understanding the behaviour of learners. Some of their key observations regarding the learners were their interest, level of learning, eager to answer the questions, discarding the myth that few students of the class cannot learn and also getting more information from the parents about the students through first Parent-teacher Meeting (PTM).

According to ST-1: "One of the teachers of the school gave me the feedback about the class allotted to me saying that they cannot read the Hindi book. I also thought that they cannot learn but then I challenged myself and empathised with them. I will deliver today's lesson plan and try to understand their learning gaps. It was a relaxing experience for me when I found some of the students started to read few words that was a sign of encouragement for me".

Student-teachers also tested that local examples were more effective in learning of their students.

ST-3: "Today I learnt that while teaching if we use examples that are from their day-to-day life it makes teaching-learning interesting and more relevant."

The student-teacher developed the above conclusion after delivering so many lesson plans. Thus, it was found that reflections of the student-teachers that were earlier mere description of the events are now moving towards real practice and reflection.

ST-4: mentioned, "Today I face a problem in the introduction of the topic in social science subject, which I wish to improve."

This shows that student-teachers probed into their pedagogy and felt the scope of improvement.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment helps student-teachers play an active role in knowing their own practice. Teacher self-

assessment is the process of making judgments about the effectiveness of their own practice so that they can be improved. Student-teachers were doing self-assessment as well as improving their practice of teaching.

According to ST-1, she was unable to manage the class in the beginning of the internship programme.

“I am unable to manage this class, but in my next classes I will try to improve myself.”

After few days of internship programme, ST-1 showed her improvement in managing the class in terms of engagement of learners. This showed that student-teacher not only self-assessed but also tried her best to improve the practice of teaching.

“I am able to manage the class and engaged all the learners in the process of learning”

Another student-teacher ST-3 mentioned that during the first PTM she was not so comfortable in conducting and interacting with parents and giving feedback about their wards, but during the second PTM they felt more confidence in interacting with parents and sharing the feedback.

ST-3: “Today I learnt how to give the feedback to the parents about their wards and sharing of their educational achievements.”

Teachers’ Responsibility—Codes and Conducts

The teaching profession has its own Code of Professional Ethics,

which is indeed a pre-requisite to ensure its dignity and integrity. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 assigns teachers with some professional responsibilities. Some of the professional ethics practiced by the student-teachers are worth mentioning here.

ST-1: “Today I noticed some of the students after taking Mid-day Meal threw the left over into the dustbin. I told the students that we have limited supply of food and lots of people in our country do not get food so, we should not waste it.”

ST-2: “Students do not give much attention towards their habit of cleanliness’ I noticed that they take their food without washing their hands. Even students come to school without brushing their teeth. I decided to talk to their parents.”

ST-3: “Today I transacted Hindi chapter *Pani Ray Pani* in Class V. I requested my peer student-teachers as well as two regular teachers of that school to observe my class and give me feedback, to improve my practice of teaching”.

Above-mentioned practices clearly indicates that the student-teachers were following the ethical responsibilities towards the teaching profession as conceptualised in the guidelines of professional ethics shared by the NCTE such as obligations towards students, parents, community, society and towards teaching profession.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Creating a safe, diverse, inclusive and positive classroom environment is key to effective teaching-learning process. Students take interest in learning when they find that their needs, voices and ideas are being addressed and respected. Student-teachers mentioned in their journal that they tried their best to focus on the cleanliness of classroom. They used to tell their students not to throw the papers and food here and there and to check their school uniform daily. Students coming with dirty uniform and casual dresses were warned and intimidated to their parents.

ST-2: "For the last few days ,I have noticed that few girls were coming in casual dress to school. On asking them, they replied that their school uniforms were very dirty. I explained the importance of uniform".

Student-teachers also found that students love to learn through games, poems, stories and activities. For example ST-4: "I was surprised to see in my class of EVS Class V, students were developing their own stories by adding words and sentences. Students are so creative."

One of the student-teacher mentioned that teachers could only understand their students and scaffold them in their learning as and when required. As per ST-3: "Students who were tagged as slow learners in the class, by the teachers and their classmates did not speak in the class and they have developed the inferiority complex

in them. I changed their seats and brought them on the front bench. I gave them all the opportunities by which they can participate in classroom activities and could reduce their inferiority complex".

DISCUSSION

Each teacher trainee is expected to keep a reflective journal that would help them revisit their experiences in the classroom over the period of School Internship Programme. The journal includes short descriptions of how the class was conducted, learners responses, followed by analytical and reflective statements about the preparedness for the class, responses to student's questions, and various issues of discipline, group, and individual and whole class activities. The findings of this study included five reflective themes, which was obtained by student-teachers by the reflection on why, what, how to teach, to what extent I was successful in achieving my goal and what I have learnt. This finding corroborates with the study of Bhogayata (2000) who found that reflective practice is required as the future teachers should take reflective decision, set their goals, plan, implement and monitor their action; self-evaluate their results and reflect on their own professional thinking. Writing reflective journals supports both the students' and the student-teachers' to become more engaged, confident, innovative and responsible. While teaching

the learners the student-teachers combined their self-assessment and critical reflection, the findings of this study is quite similar to the findings of Giroux (1988) who described teachers as transformative intellectuals who combined their reflection and practice to teach their students. Therefore, based on the above discussion it can be concluded that reflective journal is the need of the hour for teacher-education programmers' to incorporate critical reflection, to improve teaching-learning process as well as the professional growth. It should not only be practiced by the prospective teachers but also by the practicing teachers.

CONCLUSION

Reflective journals are useful documents in the process of reflection and reflective learning. The journal writing itself requires the student-teachers to think back on events that have taken place and provide opportunity for expression of personal thoughts. Reflective journals provide opportunity for the student-teachers not only to think back on the learning activities, to explicitly and purposely identify what they have learned, but more importantly, to assess what they have learned to their teaching practice, assess their practice in light of theories, and formulate action plans for improvement.

REFERENCES

- BHOGAYATA, C. 2000. A Review of Recent Contribution to Reflective Practice in Teacher Education, *Teacher Education: Vision and Mission*. pp. 117–120. *Centre for Advanced Study in Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology*. The M.S. University of Baroda, Gujarat.
- DEWEY, J. 1933. *How We Think*. USA: D. C. *Heath and Company*.
- GHAYE, T. 2000. Into the reflective Mode: Bridging the Stagnant Moat. *Reflective Practice*. Vol. 1. No.1. pp. 5–9.
- GIROUX, H.A. 1988. *Teachers as Intellectuals: Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- HUSU, J., A. TOOM AND S. PATRIKAINAN. 2008. Guided Reflection as a Means to Demonstrate and Develop Student-teachers Reflective Competencies. *Reflective Practice*. Vol. 9. No. 1. pp. 37–51.
- LARRIVEE, 2000. Transforming Teaching Practice: Becoming the Critically Reflective Teacher, *Reflective Practice*. Vol. 1, No. 3. 2000 ISSN 1462-3943 print; ISSN 1470-1103 online/00/030293-15 Ó 2000 Taylor & Francis Ltd DOI: 10.1080/14623940020025561
- NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAME WORK FOR TEACHER EDUCATION. 2009. National Council for Teacher Education. New Delhi.