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Exploring and evaluating levels of reflection in pre-service early childhood teachers

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY is to add to the current literature that focuses on approaches to assessing and evaluating reflection. It adds to this literature by developing and trialling a method of assessing reflection occurring in student teachers’ reflective tasks. The reflective tasks were taken from a Self-Assessment Manual (SAM) developed specifically for early childhood practitioners and student teachers, and piloted with six early childhood student teachers. Through the application of an adapted version of the Boud, Keogh & Walker (1985) framework (Sim, 2006), six levels of reflection processes learners might experience were identified and responses aligned to these stages. Initial results show this model was able to provide an effective framework for objectively evaluating student teachers’ levels of reflection, enabling a defined level of analysis for the assessor. What is also noted is the correlation between the type of reflection task and the reflection level demonstrated in the student teacher responses. Introducing the student teachers to the framework so they can self-assess, in order to deepen their understanding of their own reflection levels, is the next step of the project.

Introduction

The benefits of reflection as a practice for teachers has been well-documented (Artzt & Armour-Thomas, 2002; Margolis, 2002; Mayes, 2001; Moore, 2002; Rock & Levin, 2002; Swain, 1998), along with the understanding that the ability to systematically and deliberately use reflection as a learning tool in professional practice requires conscientious development over time in pre-service and post-service courses (as cited in Atkins, 2005). Requiring student teachers to take part in activities that involve some form of reflection is an accepted practice in teacher training courses; however, Plack, Driscoll, Blissett, McKenna & Plack (2005) remind us that “While reflection is generally accepted as a critical component of learning from experience and essential to professional education, limited research has been conducted to address the issue of how to assess reflection’ (p. 210). This is something many teacher educators grapple with when having to mark or grade reflective tasks. Student teachers are asked to reflect on their experiences but then there is often no sure way of evaluating these reflections, owing to the subjective and personal nature of these reflective tasks. This study attempts to address this dilemma by applying a model able to identify and categorise the level/s of reflection students are engaging in. It is hoped that this framework, once tested by the student teachers themselves, will provide them with a greater insight into their own reflection processes, ultimately enabling them to strive for a higher level of critical reflection. With assessment driving much of the learning process, there needs to be a sound way of assessing reflection to remove the problems often related to the notion of assessing reflective tasks for both educators and students (Sim, 2006).

While there appears to be many definitions of reflection in the literature, Atkins and Murphy (1993) maintain that there are elements which are essential to the reflective process; an awareness of uncomfortable feelings and thoughts which is followed by a critical analysis of both the feelings and the experience. It is deemed that, through this analytical process, a change in practice occurs. The critically reflective teacher provides space
for ‘new possibilities to be explored and realised’ (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 145). In our experience, simply completing specific reflection tasks does not in itself ensure that reflection takes place, as often the reflection is more of a description about an experience devoid of the critical process of analysis.

Schön (1983; 1987), Mezirow (1990), Brookfield (1995), Barnett (1995) and Fisher (2003) identified characteristics afforded to critical reflection, such as the ability to articulate a contextual awareness of one’s own position through identifying the impact of one’s own influences and background. To be able to identify one’s own views, beliefs and assumptions, consider other perspectives or alternative ways of viewing the world; being able to identify what perspectives are missing from one’s account; identify how one’s own views can have a particular bias that privileges one view over another; perceive contradictions and inconsistencies in one’s own account of events; and imagine other possibilities (i.e. a capacity to envision alternatives, Fisher, 2003, p. 317) have all been noted as important characteristics to add the critical component to reflection. These characteristics are often not clearly identifiable in student teachers’ work and, as such, a judgement about the criticality of their reflection is problematic. The very act of assessment dictates setting of criteria, which, according to Boud, is inappropriate, as ‘effective reflective practice needs to be unboundaried’ (as cited in Bolton, 2001, p. 83). There is a mismatch between reflection and assessment, since the nature of reflection requires one to question pre-suppositions and uncertainties and yet the very same reflective task is often being assessed for understanding of subject matter (Boud & Walker, 1998). Hence, education researchers question the value of assessment of reflection while others caution that the very process of creating assessment criteria will stifle the spontaneity of reflection (Beveridge, 1997; Sumsion & Fleet, 1996).

Rationale for our study

In order to produce reflective practitioners, we feel a need to have some type of measure to assess a student’s capacity to reflect, which will also allow for feedback on learning to students, educators and organisations (Plack et al., 2005; Bourner, 2003). Once a successful measure is developed and tested, student teachers could be made aware that there are different levels to the reflective process and how their progress in reflective thinking fits within the levels. Working in this way, we believe, will help them develop a better understanding of the process. By making the process explicit, it is hoped they will begin to internalise the process which will transfer in time to their everyday practice as a teacher. As Fisher (2003, p. 314), referring to the work of Fay (1987), states ‘human beings, through critical self-reflection, can come to see the true nature of their existence and act to change their situation, based on this understanding’. Before this is possible a suitable measure must be established.

Developing a reflective evaluation framework

There are studies which have drawn on both qualitative and quantitative methods in an attempt to evaluate proficiency in the reflection process, with varying rates of success. Like Bourner (2003), initially we saw one way of progressing the idea of developing a framework to apply in the assessment of the reflection of our students as separating content and process, which would allow for assessment of the reflective process without judging the subjective nature of the reflection. Studies which appear more successful draw on the work of Boud et al. (1985), who defined stages in the reflective processes, and Mezirow (1990), who developed a theoretical framework around the components of the reflective process. A study by Wong, Kember and Chung (1995) combined these two concepts while another study (Plack et al., 2005) added a time dimension (reflection in action, reflection on action, reflection for action), drawing from the work of Schön. However, a study by Williams, Sundelin and Foster-Seargeant (2000) chose to exclude Mezirow’s categories, saying they ‘preferred to focus on the process of reflection rather than on what they suggest to be categorization of the different types of reflection’ (Plack et al., 2005, p. 205).

We decided that, for our study, we would use levels of reflection, and chose an adaptation by Sim (2006) of the framework of Boud et al. (1985) which had been used successfully with health care professionals undertaking further training. Boud et al. (1985) proposed a generic framework of reflection that describes six levels of reflection processes learners might experience. The categories relate to the stage of reflection and returning to experience, attending to feelings, association, integration, validation and appropriation. These are hierarchic in nature: returning to experience, a basic recounting to appropriation where knowledge is internalised and leads to changes in behaviour, the learner’s affective state and perspectives. Following is a brief description of each level.

Level 1: Returning to experience

This is an essential step of recounting past experiences so that subsequent reflections are based on actual recollection of events. This usually entails describing events and activities, and while not considered reflection as such, it is a precursor to reflection.
Level 2: Attending to feelings

This level recognises the importance of feelings in facilitating or obstructing the learning experience since ‘utilising our positive feelings is particularly important as they can provide us with the impetus to persist in what might be very challenging situations’ (Boud et al., 1985, p. 29). Allowing learners to articulate their feelings helps them understand their emotions in the learning context, an important characteristic of self-directed learners (Patterson, Crooks & Lunyk-child, 2002). Student reflections would demonstrate awareness of their feelings at the beginning of the reflective experience and recognition that these feelings can either assist or hinder the learning process.

Level 3: Association

This refers to relating new knowledge to pre-existing understanding, feelings or attitudes, and involves the consideration of multiple perspectives. Reflections at this level show how perhaps exchanges at discussion forums, etc. have forced the student to consider multiple perspectives by reconciling new ideas with existing workplace knowledge.

Level 4: Integration

This involves synthesising old and new knowledge, resulting in the formation of new insight. Reflections show that, as a result of the knowledge the student has acquired or been made more aware of, came the ‘new’ insight.

Level 5: Validation

Testing and verifying the proposed synthesis for (internal) consistency are characteristics of this level. Reflections reveal how the students, instead of simply using motherhood statements, deliberately conceptualise ways to incorporate a new concept.

Level 6: Appropriation

This calls for using the knowledge together with one’s own. Reflections show how the student is using the process of reflection in her awareness and daily approach towards work, leading to outcomes ranging from changes in behaviour, changes in the learner’s affective state and changes in perspectives (perspective transformation or transformative learning—Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1990). It involves ‘becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world’ (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14). It requires a major shift in one’s basic assumption and a consequent change in perspective and personal paradigm. Changes in behaviour could be viewed as Action outcomes, changes in the learner’s affective state as Affective outcomes and changes in beliefs as Perspective outcomes.

Action outcomes involve a new way of doing things, development of new skills, commitment to action and or readiness for application. This would be seen in the student’s readiness to apply her newly acquired reflective skills to action.

Affective outcomes involve a change in attitude or emotional state. It involves a ‘positive attitude towards learning in a particular area, greater confidence or assertiveness, or a changed set of priorities’ (Boud et al., 1985, p. 34). The student’s changed attitude to wanting to find out more about a certain aspect of practice, along with her increased motivation towards learning, would be evidence of this.

Perspective outcomes involve changes in perspectives and beliefs and values. This is characterised by the student changing her perspective on reflection.

It must be noted, however, that these levels do not necessarily occur in sequence, neither do learners need to experience each level of the reflective process. In fact, validation and appropriation, which form the higher levels of the reflection process, could also be viewed as a form of reflective outcomes.

Another factor to consider is that assessment tasks, unless thoughtfully designed, may not make it easy to identify subtle shifts in student teachers’ transmission of knowledge or how this impacts on their practice. This highlights the importance of designing the reflective tasks and the questions that will guide this task.

Methodology

This research project applied Sim’s (2006) adapted version of Boud et al.’s (1985) model of assessing reflection to the work of pre-service early childhood student teachers. The reflective evaluation framework was piloted with a group of six early childhood student teachers, who undertook reflective tasks taken from a Self-Assessment Manual (SAM) (Raban et al., 2007). This manual, specifically designed to guide early childhood practitioners and student teachers in the reflection process, provides the opportunity to think through and record past and present training and professional experiences, and plan for future professional growth and development. The student teachers, through guided reflection, undertake a series of tasks encouraging the documenting of past experiences, reflection on beliefs and values in relation to teaching and learning, mapping current practice across theoretical perspectives, and setting challenges for the future. The tasks are designed to capture thinking around practical experiences, influences on development and knowledge acquisition, and feelings towards both the reflective process and their own
journey as a developing professional. At three points in the manual the student teachers share their task reflections with each other in small group forums. The SAM is divided into four sections as follows:

**Section 1: Past experience**
This section asks participants to recount motivations for choosing a career path in early childhood, the mentors and role models who have guided their development to the current point, previous work experience in the field, and previous experience that might add to their skills as an early childhood practitioner.

**Section 2: Present experiences**
In this section questions relate to the practical experiences each participant has undertaken during training in early childhood settings, the positive aspects of the combined experience in these settings (What have they been able to achieve? What have they learned?), knowledge of professional organisations that could support their own work/development in the field, and professional learning outside of their own study. Finally, each participant is asked to consider the qualities, dispositions and behaviours they believe to be needed for their future career in the field. Within this section there is an ‘Individual Reflection’ task asking for the identification of significant influences on their emerging profile as an early childhood practitioner, particular areas of professional learning that are becoming significant to them and areas thought to be a growing strength or specialisation.

**Section 3: Beliefs and values**
Stem statements to be completed by the participant around their philosophy are located in this section, leading to the articulation of personal philosophies/approaches to teaching and learning. The accompanying ‘Individual Reflection’ task asks for a summary of these completed stem statements, guiding the participant in the recognition of the most significant beliefs and values impacting on their practice. Also in this section is the task ‘Developing a Practitioner Profile’, which enables participants to map their current practice to theoretical perspectives to produce a matrix which is then reflected on to see how well this fits with personal beliefs, values and understandings.

**Section 4: Future experiences**
This section concentrates on the consideration of further study possibilities, and the identification of skills/knowledge for further development.

The six student teachers who took part in this study were part of the larger cohort undertaking a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree in Victoria in 2007. All written responses, as captured by the Self-Assessment Manual, became the data set after the completion and assessment of the unit, along with a post-evaluation survey of the process.

To analyse the data, Henri’s (Herrington & Oliver, 1999) thematic unit of analysis was adopted owing to its flexibility in coding data. Henri’s thematic unit refers to counting each ‘unit of meaning’ by extracting the meaning from the text without the constraint of word, sentence or paragraph limitation (Herrington & Oliver, 1999). Therefore, the length of the unit of meaning is dependent on the participants’ writing style, allowing for flexibility when coding. As the data involved participants’ learning and reflections, explicit statements were the norm, with subtle meanings a rarity. Thus the issues of increased subjectivity and low coding reliability associated with coding for more subtle themes posed less of a problem in this study (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison & Archer, 2001).

Some educational researchers maintain that using the highest level of reflection outcomes give ‘over-estimated reflective scores’, and propose instead the use of the mean reflective score of each participant as a more accurate measure (Hawkes & Romiszowski, 2001, p. 292). However, as the reflection coding recorded the student teachers sharing their learning at each stage of the topic, rather than a record of the continuum of their reflective processes, it would be inappropriate to obtain the mean reflective score from these reflection responses. In addition, the researchers were interested in finding out if particular reflective activities embedded in SAM attracted a higher level of reflective response. The results therefore give an indication of the level of reflective process experienced by each student teacher and the extent of the reflection outcomes. Thus, although this approach does not indicate the mean reflective scores of each student teacher, relying on the frequency count of the reflective process was an appropriate and adequate methodology for this study.

The adapted Boud et al. model served to inform and guide the researchers regarding the criteria for analysing and assigning the data into the reflection levels; however, coder stability and inter-rater reliability were important aspects needing to be developed before coding could begin. For reliable analysis both researchers needed to form a consensus on the criteria for each level of reflection in the model. Time was devoted to developing inter-rater reliability where the extent to which both coders, each coding the same content, came to the same decisions. To ensure inter-rater reliability, both researchers independently coded the six sets of SAM data. Attention was focused on the correct application of concept and definition of reflective process rather than on the agreement of starting and ending of the code. This is because the latter is often arbitrary and thus not a good measure of reliability (Gibbs, 2002).
This process to ensure coder stability (Rourke et al., 2001) took time, as one researcher was familiar with the Self-Assessment Manual and early childhood content delivered within the unit and course, while the other researcher was more experienced with applying the model to health-care professionals.

Findings

Based on the reflective evaluation framework, all student teachers demonstrated some level of reflective process, except integration and, in terms of outcomes of reflection, perspective change. The following Table 1 shows each participant in relation to the levels of reflection attained.

In terms of the first level of reflection (Returning to experience), all participants showed evidence of this in their responses. For the second level (Attending to feelings) most of the student teachers were coded as expressing their emotions in their SAM workbook. Examples included:

I have found this style of reflective thinking very worthwhile as I am really enjoying learning more about philosophy, having done my previous training in only one philosophy (Montessori) (Participant 4).

One member of the group spoke of her despondency with the industry but we all shared that if everyone banded together to achieve a system that could enhance the children’s learning despite the system and maybe in spite of it, then we have brought good to the industry (Participant 5).

Three of the student teachers (50%) were coded as demonstrating validation, while three showed association and appropriation. This suggests these student teachers were able to relate their pre-existing experiences and knowledge to their newly acquired knowledge (association), testing the validity of new concepts (validation) and incorporating the process of reflection in their awareness and daily approaches towards teaching practices (appropriation) as the following excerpts illustrate:

The ability to be open to dialogue and change is the foundation upon which all professional development is constructed (Association from Participant 1).

Furthermore this high score under the ecological system correlates with my view that because our lives are constantly changing for instance when we move house, settle in a new job, have a baby or travel, this impacts on the relationships within the family, childcare environment and beyond. These impacts need to be recognised and utilised to add meaning to the program the child experiences and to link it to family. The ecological approach is one which is strongly influenced by a layering of relationships and networks (Validation from Participant 1).

The impact that these beliefs will have on my future as an early childhood professional are that I need to produce a program that will facilitate each child’s learning, it will need to be open-ended and cater for each child’s way of learning (Appropriation from Participant 6).

Table 1. Coding results of reflection process by the first researcher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of reflective process</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Returning to experience</td>
<td>0A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending to feelings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive feelings</td>
<td>1A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative feelings</td>
<td>1B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes of reflection</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>6A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective (emotions)</td>
<td>6B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives</td>
<td>6C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
higher levels of the reflective process. However, the fact that not all participants demonstrated the validation and appropriation levels does not necessarily indicate their inability to reflect at these levels. It may be simply that the student teacher participants here did not articulate that aspect of reflection during their SAM activities. Another possible explanation is that some participants (for instance Participant 5) were able to achieve reflection outcomes without the need to experience each reflection level (Boud et al., 1985).

Not all student teachers were coded to demonstrate reflection outcomes. Only two of the six participants showed affective outcomes while four were coded to demonstrate action outcomes (see Table 1). An example of affective reflection outcome is illustrated in the following comment:

I will try to adopt a willingness to adapt, to be flexible to change and be more reflective and to participate in regular self assessment (Participant 1).

Action outcomes refer to the participants’ explicit views about their commitment to action, readiness to apply their new knowledge and skills, or simply indicating development of new skills, as illustrated by the following comments:

If I was to run a centre, I would like to develop a program centred around family grouping which I believe is a more true to life manner of organising rooms and settings, a layering of children, toddlers and adults all interacting, supporting and assisting each other in learning and cooperation (Participant 1).

I will make a difference and I will. I will humble myself to keep gaining knowledge to take out and share in the community and spread the word around my colleagues in the industry (Participant 5).

When considering the SAM tasks and the levels of reflection elicited by the various tasks, no clear pattern is discernable (See Table 2). However, many of the SAM tasks begin by asking participants to recount experiences before moving into reflective questions about these experiences, and, as such, the student teachers are guided to return to their experiences, hence the fact that all student teachers showed Level 1 reflection. It is also interesting to note that Sections 2 and 4 provided the most Level 5 reflections, but this was not the case for all participants; and for one student teacher, only one section of SAM provided reflections that could be coded—Section 2.

Individuals reflect at different levels and the disparity of frequency of reflections between different sections is indicative of the differing levels of reflections by individuals. In addition, one possible reason for not all students displaying reflection outcomes could be because this cohort of student teachers is only in the early stages of their undergraduate program, has entered the course with varying levels of experience, and is still in the early stages of reflective learning.

Table 2. Coding of student responses to SAM tasks—applying levels of reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAM tasks</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past experiences</td>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2: Present experiences</td>
<td>Level 1&lt;br&gt;Level 2 (x 2)&lt;br&gt;Level 6: Action&lt;br&gt;Level 6: Affective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3: Beliefs &amp; values</td>
<td>Level 5&lt;br&gt;Level 6: Action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level 1: Returning to experience  
Level 3: Association  
Level 5: Validation  
Level 2: Attending to feelings  
Level 4: Integration  
Level 6: Appropriation = Outcomes: A) Action B) Affective C) Perspectives
Discussion

Structured reflective process

It is important to ensure that reflection does not occur in a ‘vacuum’, rather that students are guided through the process of reflecting within their context of learning. Thus, as part of the student teacher development, SAM provided a structured process of guided reflection, leading the students through the process of reflecting on their past and present experiences, beliefs, values and practices, and relating and reflecting on their future aspirations of professional growth. The learning and reflection process was further enhanced with reflection occurring both at an individual and group level. Each of these guided activities provided opportunities for students to go through the reflective process as described by Boud et al. (1985): returning to experience, association, integration, validation, appropriation, and outcomes of reflection including action, affective and change of perspective at their own pace and stage.

Reflection evaluation framework

What has become apparent is the ability of the evaluation framework to provide a structure for the assessment of reflective writing. The flexibility of the framework to the individual responses of the student teachers demonstrates that it can pinpoint the depth of reflection the student is applying to their work. This is useful when faced with the difficult task of assessing reflection tasks: it clearly shows the reflection levels applied by the student and constructive feedback relating to the differing levels of reflection and what they entail. If introduced to the student, the evaluation framework will provide a structured process by showing students how they can move between the different levels of reflection and what might be considered within each level. By creating an awareness of where students are reflecting within this framework, they could be assisted in their ability to self-evaluate, thereby facilitating subsequent reflective opportunities to reflect at a higher level. Thus, information obtained from the evaluation framework can be used to empower learners in their future reflective experiences.

Implications and recommendations

A number of conditions need to be in place to ensure that the proposed combined model of structured reflective process and evaluation framework succeeds.

First, reflection has its risks. Challenging or questioning one’s own practice puts the practitioner in a vulnerable position (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000; Hillier, 2002). This is especially true when the issues discussed are political, social or ethical, subjecting participating practitioners to a higher level of personal or professional risk (Bolton, 2001). The self-evaluation process may also lead to a range of negative emotions such as frustration, despair, fear or disgust. Another outcome of reflection may be confrontation in the workplace. Public expression of one’s reflections may result in disagreement at the workplace and may lead to awkward situations for some (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2000). Hence, it is important that reflection be effectively facilitated and conducted in a safe, supportive and structured learning environment (Bolton, 2001; Boud et al., 1985; FitzGerald & Chapman, 2000; Hawkes & Romiszowski, 2001).

Second, the reflective activities must be authentic, contextualised and meaningful in order to encourage student engagement (Herrington & Bunker, 2002). Third, there must be protected ‘thinking time’ so as to ensure sufficient time is set aside for students to reflect instead of performing a cursory reflection. Fourth, educators should also employ multiple reflective techniques to facilitate the development of reflection. By using a variety of reflective techniques, it is more likely that students will fully engage in the reflection process (Nolan, 2008).

Last but not least, activities should be designed so as to encourage individual and collaborative reflection. Individual and collective reflections can provide the necessary encouragement and new perspectives, allowing practitioners to understand their own assumptions and validation of presuppositions of their work practices (Bolton, 2001; Mezirow, 1990).

There are recommendations for future studies. First, owing to the small number of participants in this study, there is a need for the study to be replicated with a larger cohort of student teachers to see if results are similar. Second, a similar study could be conducted with other professions, such as healthcare professionals who are also required to be reflective practitioners, to ascertain if the combination of carefully crafted tasks does facilitate higher levels of reflections in students.

Conclusion

A structured reflective guide that is contextualised can be used to guide practitioners in their reflection process, thereby facilitating the development of practitioners’ reflective practice (Buiman, 2000; Burnard, 1991; Cranton, 1996; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; Mezirow, 1981). When used in conjunction with a reflective evaluation framework, the level of reflection can be assessed. It is hoped this framework will prove useful for educators who have the task of assessing reflection, and that, once the evaluation framework is introduced to student teachers, they will also find it a useful tool to consider when completing reflection tasks. Assessing the levels and quality of reflection is an achievable task.
The study is now ready to progress to the next stage, which will involve introducing the evaluation framework to student teachers to establish whether or not informing learners of the levels of reflection will indeed result in enhancing their reflective skills. If successful, this proposed model of developing and enhancing learners’ reflective process will have significant implications on how educators assist learners in their journey towards becoming reflective practitioners. For now, we view the reflective framework as enabling a defined level of analysis of reflective tasks for assessors of student teachers work.

References


