

Chapter 24

Reflection Activities Within Clinical Experiences: An Important Component of Field- Based Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the importance of reflection activities within clinical experiences that often are prescribed components of field-based teacher education. This chapter will include a review of documented attempts to understand the impact reflection activities have on teacher candidate growth. More specifically, this chapter will review what we know about the emphasis on reflective practice within teacher education and professional practice, what typical reflection activities within a field-based teacher education context are, and how reflective ability is measured within field-based clinical experiences. The chapter finishes with implications and recommendations for research and practice within teacher education.

INTRODUCTION

A universal goal of teacher preparation is to produce profession-ready individuals with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of a reflective practitioner able to respond to students' needs in dynamic classroom environments. Teacher preparation programs have moved beyond emphasizing only theory of effective teaching without exposure to real-world contexts. The current movement towards field-based teacher education integrates coursework and clinical experiences. The clinical experiences are considered by many teacher educators to be the most important aspect of authentic learning and the key to profession-readiness (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017; Blanton, Pugach, Florian, 2011; Connelly & Graham, 2009;

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Gelfuso, Dennis, & Parker, 2015; Maheady, Smith, & Jabot, 2014; Recchia & Puig, 2011; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). Therefore, it is not surprising that clinical experiences are considered to be a critical component of all preparation programs by education accreditation organizations (e.g., Allen, Coble, & Crowe, 2014; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's [NCATE], 2010). Many teacher educators have identified best practices for implementing clinical experiences (e.g., Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Murphy, 2012). Most agree that clinical experiences should be strategically developed to allow teacher candidates to complete the following: use theory in practice, have opportunities for self-reflection, and have multiple opportunities for meaningful feedback and guidance (see Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Clinical experiences within teacher preparation programs often include a number of required activities such as lesson planning, teaching observations, and portfolios, but one of the most common across empirically documented field-based experiences is reflection activities (see Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017).

Most teacher education programs create clinical experiences that allow teacher candidates opportunities to apply their knowledge in real classroom situations and then think about their choices in a meaningful way through reflection. In fact, Roth (1989) indicated that reflection cannot be taught in isolation of clinical experiences. One possible reason for the common pairing is that teacher candidates' reflective practices are more likely to translate to professional routines if taught directly during teacher preparation field-experiences (Etscheidt, Curran, & Sawyer, 2012; Moore, 2003). Additionally, professional teaching standards place emphasis on reflective practice and view it as a professional practice needing attention during teacher preparation. For example, both the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), through its Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC), and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) include professional teaching standards that focus on reflection on one's own teaching practices (CCSSO, 2011; CEC, 2012). For example the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards and Learning Progressions for Teachers (CCSSO, 2017) state teachers should reflect to:

- *Examine practice to see how well it addresses individual learner needs;*
- *Share practice with others (e.g., invite peers to observe in class, share video of self) and use feedback to better meet learner needs; and*
- *Work with a [mentor] to better understand current practice and make adjustments (p. 18).*

Similarly, CEC's (2015) What Every Special Educator Must Know: Ethics, Standards and Guidelines explain that an emphasis on reflection is important so that special educators:

- *Are aware of how their own and others' attitudes, behaviors, and ways of communicating can influence their practice;*
- *Understand that culture and language can interact with exceptionalities, and are sensitive to the many aspects of diversity of individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families;*
- *Actively plan and engage in activities that foster their professional growth and keep them current with evidence-based best practices, and;*
- *Know their own limits of practice and practice within them (p. 50).*

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the importance of reflective practice, one of the most common clinical experience activities. This chapter provides a review of the research to date on the use of reflection activities within teacher preparation. In addition, the chapter defines key terms including

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