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The Role of Field Experience in the Preparation of Reflective Teachers

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Abstract: A basic condition for teachers developing their personal theory about teaching and utilising their knowledge in practice and perceiving and managing the complexity of the teaching process, is their ability to analyse the teaching process and to reflect on it. The research data presented in this article comes from research carried out, during which the role of field experience in teachers training was examined, and in particular to what extent and under what conditions field experience contributes to developing the ability of teachers to analyse and evaluate the teaching process. To answer those questions, information was primarily obtained from reflection reports prepared by trainee teachers (N=68) after they had completed their field experience. One initial conclusion arising from the research is that trainee teachers find it difficult during their field experience to reflect on their teaching and when they do so, their reflection focuses on very specific topics, and is primarily technocratic in nature. The content, form, depth and general method of reflection among trainee teachers appears to be affected (a) by the personal profile of each trainee teacher and (b) by the way in which field experience is organised. A systematic description of the content and potential types of reflection provides us with a clear framework which can be utilised as a springboard by trainee teachers and full-time teachers to approach the task of teaching from a reflective perspective. The research data generated is significant for planning training courses for teachers and in particular for planning and organising work experience.

Introduction

Many of the things that teachers do are done as a matter of routine, however teachers are also required in parallel to engage in activities which are dictated by the special needs of their pupils and the conditions which exist from time to time. They are required to teach numerous pupils at the same time, to achieve multiple objectives; objectives which change depending on context. At the same time, teachers have a 'personal theory' which impacts on choices –whether consciously or not-, on how they analyse reality, perceive the theory and research and directs their studies and activities (Carr & Kemmis, 1997, Fullan, 1993). A basic condition for each teacher developing personal theory about teaching and utilising knowledge in practice and perceiving and managing the complexity of the teaching process, is ability to analyse the teaching process and to reflect on it.

The ability to analyse teaching -reflection and contemplation- is to a large degree the result of systematic training. Consequently, the question arises of 'what processes and practices at teacher training level contribute to the development of reflective teachers?'. Various forms of field experience such as classroom teaching experience, microteaching techniques, workshops and case studies could contribute to achieving this. This study focuses on two questions: a) To what extent the field experience of preservice teachers contribute to the development of their ability to analyse and evaluate the teaching

process (reflective practice) and b) Under what conditions does the field experience of preservice teachers contribute to developing the ability of teachers to be reflective.

Reflection in the work of teachers: content and forms

“Problems in education have no fixed answers. No teacher education program can prepare teachers for all the situations they will encounter. Teachers themselves will make the final decisions from among many alternatives. Such judgments may be good or poor” (Han 1995). Therefore, reflection is a key component of being a professional (Sch•n, 1983) and has many definitions in the context of teacher cognition. Reflective teaching means looking at what you do in the classroom and thinking about why you do it. But the reflection is more than a state of doubt, uncertainty, which followed by the act of searching to find solutions (Dewey, 1933). Reflection is a basic condition for understanding the complexity of the pedagogic process, for selecting the suitable teaching methods, strategies, means, etc. depending on the teaching objectives, the needs of pupils, personal perceptions and the wider context in which the pedagogic process takes place (Zeichner 1996). Reflective practitioners analyze the influence of context and shape their teaching and pedagogical choices. Moreover, critical reflection goes beyond the technical aspects of teaching and questions are posed such as the extent to which didactic choices promote social justice, equality, and so on. Also, reflection is a means of comprehending one's own self, of identifying the knowledge, values and perceptions that each teacher has, and a means of controlling and promoting personal development and growth (Guston & Northfield, 1994: 525, Graham & Phelps, 2003, Parson & Stephenson, 2005, Minott, 2008).

In order to systematically cultivate the ability of teachers to be reflective, a vital condition is that the concept of reflection be defined in terms that permit, to some degree, an analysis and evaluation of reflective thought through the observable conduct (or verbal expressions) of teachers. The concept of reflection in educational research changes meaning from period to period, and researchers have taken different stances on how to demarcate the starting points, levels, content, process, and timing of reflection (See Lee, 2005 for a systematic and critical presentation of these approaches). In order to outline the concept of reflection it is first necessary to describe: a) the content of reflection, and b) the *forms* of reflection are adopted.

The *content* of teacher reflection, is associated with teaching duties and the factors associated with the task of teaching. This duties and tasks are defined, on the one hand, by the existing circumstances and framework and, on the other, by their personal experiences, views and needs, a fact that makes the *a priori* definition of this duties extremely difficult. However, there are a minimum of duties and tasks that are necessary for every teacher, in order for them to fulfil the basic functions of their role. Despite the fact that the teaching process is complex and is affected by numerous factors, key factors which a teacher must take decisions on when performing teaching duties, even in centralist education systems, are as follows (see Table 1):

- a) The subject matter
- b) The curriculum and text books
- c) The teaching objectives
- d) The teaching methods, forms and strategies
- e) Pupil and course evaluation
- f) Class management.

Teachers take decisions about these issues via certain cognitive processes. I posed above concerning the forms of reflection. VanManen (1977), Valli (1990), Grimmer et al. (1990) propose that reflection be analysed on three levels: the technocratic, interpretative and critical levels. This article adopts that categorisation, with the only difference being that the three levels are not viewed in any hierarchical way, as they had been viewed by the aforementioned researchers. In other words, critical reflection is not considered to be a higher form of reflection than technocratic reflection. That is because all three forms of reflection are needed for analysing teaching as praxis depending on the

context. That is why they have been dubbed '*forms* of reflection' rather than levels of reflection. These specific terms can be defined as follows (see Table 1):

a) Technocratic reflection: this relates to recording teaching and learning behaviours and aspects of social interaction which develop during the teaching process. Moreover, it is associated with checking the adequacy of the means used (forms, methods, strategies, equipment, etc.) to achieve pre-specified objectives, which must be achieved and are not open to negotiation and modification.

b) Interpretative reflection: This relates to identifying the theoretical assumptions which lie behind didactic choices. The content, objectives, methods, and means are 'up for negotiation' and can change or be modified. It is useful whenever the teachers are faced with questions or dilemmas which have to answer by taking into account theoretical assumptions, research findings, the specific context in which teaching takes place, and own perceptions and values.

c) Critical reflection: This relates to the impacts of didactic choices and an evaluation thereof. This evaluation is not done using the criterion of whether objectives were achieved (technocratic reflection) nor their suitability based on theory, context and educational needs (interpretative reflection). Evaluation is carried out based on moral criteria derived from the social and political reality. Questions are posed such as the extent to which didactic choices promote social justice, equality, and so on.

	Technocratic reflection	Interpretative reflection	Critical reflection
Subject matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of module • What concepts do I want to teach (mapping exercise) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are those concepts associated with other subjects? • What criterion can be used to generalise the 'truths' of a branch of knowledge? • What alternative views about the subject exist? • What are my own views about the subject being taught? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What value does the subject have for the lives of pupils? • What are the possible misinterpretations?
Curriculum & text books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the curriculum say should be taught to pupils? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What relations are there between the subjects being taught? • Do the curriculum and books meet the needs and profiles of the pupils? • Where in the curriculum or text books do additions, changes need to be made? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impacts will the points covered by the curriculum which have to be taught to pupils, have on their lives? • What impacts do the content of text books have on pupils?
Teaching objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of teaching objectives set 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What criteria are used to select teaching objectives? • What level of objectives should I set? • What objectives will be common for all pupils and what ones will differ? • What previous relevant knowledge and experiences do pupils have? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impacts do the objectives set have on pupils?
Teaching forms & methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of teaching forms & methods to achieve the objectives set 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At what stage of their biological, social, psychological and cognitive development are my pupils? • What means do I have available? • How have my pupils learned how to learn? • To what extent does the pupil have the official linguistic code? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impacts will each teaching form & method have on the pupils?
Teaching & pupil evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What techniques can I use to obtain the information I need? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the objective of the evaluation? • What criteria should I set? • Who will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation and in what way? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to the results of the evaluation.
Class management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When will rewards and punishments be meted out, and in what way? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What might pupil behavioural problems be due to? • What might a lack of learning incentives among pupils be due to? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results of rewards and punishments.

Table 1: The content and forms of reflection

As is clear from Table 1, the content and forms of reflection provide a framework for analysing teacher reflection. The framework could provide a basis for developing reflection among preservice teachers and full-time teachers. However, the existence of a framework, although necessary, is not a

sufficient prerequisite. The ability to analyse teaching via reflection and contemplation is to a significant degree the result of systematic training of the teacher. Consequently, the question arises of 'what processes and practices at teacher training level contribute to the development of reflective teachers?'. Of course, it is not easily to determine these processes and practices *a priori* in some absolute manner. However, field experience for preservice teachers is a basic requirement in order for preservice teachers to associate theory with practice, to understand the complexity of the pedagogic process, and to realise and shape their own personal perceptions about teaching and their own role.

Research methodology

The following questions are explored in the context of this research:

- a) *To what extent the field experience of preservice teachers contribute to the development of their ability to analyse and evaluate the teaching process?* In particular,
 - ✓ Do preservice teachers develop reflective thought during field experience?
 - ✓ What aspects of the teaching process do they reflect on?
 - ✓ What form of reflection was adopted?

- b) *Under what conditions does the field experience of preservice teachers contribute to developing the ability of teachers to be reflective?* In particular,
 - ✓ What feedback do they receive?
 - ✓ Did they accept the comments about their teaching?
 - ✓ Is the end result a revised way of teaching?
 - ✓ What factors prevented them from systematically engaging in reflection and analysing the teaching process? In order to explore the impact of various factors on the development of reflective thought among preservice teachers I examined (a) the context of participants (overall curriculum, method by which field experience was organised) and (b) the profile of the participants (personal details, other studies, professional experience, personal perceptions about their role and about teaching).

To answer these questions, information was primarily obtained from reflection reports prepared by preservice teachers -using a specific research tool- after they had completed their field experience. The participants in the research (N=68) were preservice secondary school teachers who attended pedagogic training courses and in particular 14 students had field experience in the form of microteaching workshops (the first 14 in Table 2) while the other 54 had field experience in school classrooms. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, all names in this document are pseudonyms.

Data were analysed using a qualitative approach and in particular content analysis as follows: a) description based on thematic subjects, b) interpretation (namely the material being examined was looked at and interpreted based on the relevant theoretical assumptions) and c) content analysis. In order to determine the framework for analysing the reflection engaged in by preservice teachers, methods which have already been tested in similar studies, such as those of VanManen (1977), Schön (1983), Valli (1997) and Amobi (2005), were used. The data analysis process consisted of four stages: a) coding the criteria for analysing reflective thinking among preservice teachers and development of a system of categories based on the relevant theoretical discussion and research primarily, and secondarily after a trial run of the categories on a sample of student teacher reports, b) coding of responses based on these categories, c) summarising each case study based on the categories in order to examine the relationships between the categories and correlate them to the profile of students (e.g. views about teaching, previous teaching experience, studies, form / organisation of field experience they were involved in) and d) the comparative method for both data and cases.

Research data

Of the cases of preservice teachers who were examined (N=68) one initial fact which is clear is that field experience impacts in very different ways on each preservice teacher (See Table 2). Even in cases of preservice teachers who attended exactly the same course of studies and have a similar profile in terms of their individual features (e.g. age, gender, studies, professional experience), it is clear that field experience impacts in different ways.

What aspects of the teaching process do they reflect on?

As far as the content of preservice teacher reflection is concerned, it appears that interest is focused on the forms and methods of teaching which will be utilised when teaching, and on the objectives set. They primarily engage in technocratic reflection on these matters, in other words they utilise a theoretical framework and attempt to make the best possible choice in order to achieve the pre-specified teaching objectives. In order to formulate those teaching objectives, only one in three approximately used the curriculum. Some students appear to have designed their teaching plans based exclusively on the text books.

What is worth pointing out is that students on field experience did not reflect on the subjects they were teaching, but took the knowledge being imparted as being a fact and not open to question. Their thoughts focused on the 'how' of teaching and not the 'what', which was something that they took to be a given. Moreover, they did not appear to have been concerned about pupil evaluation, despite the fact that all of them were asked to design an evaluation sheet. Lastly, it does not appear that the students dealt with class management issues, except for a few cases.

What form of reflection was adopted?

Most preservice teachers analysed their teaching by having in mind some specific theoretical framework about how to set teaching objectives, the forms and methods of teaching and how to use equipment and materials. Based on those theoretical assumptions they attempted to plan and then evaluate their own teaching (*technocratic reflection*). Some characteristic examples of what they said are cited below: *"I set the objective of the pupils understanding the reasons for religious reform and of them actively participating in the class. I chose those objectives based on the criterion of meeting three sectoral objectives: cognitive, psychokinetic and emotional objectives. I also planned a pupil-focused form of teaching adopting dialogue as my method, because in order for teaching to be successful it must be centred around the pupil"* (Eleni), *"I choose a text-centred approach to help the pupils understand the meaning of the text and to present it in acceptable Modern Greek"* (Anastasia) (See table 2).

		FORM			FEEDBACK			ACCEPTANC			RECONSTRUCTION			
		Technocratic	Interpretative	Critical	Description	Positive comments	Negative comments	Positive and negative comments	Passivity	Reject/ Defense	Acceptance	No	Implicit	Explicit
<i>Field experience in the form of microteaching workshops</i>	Maria	•						•		•			•	
	Katerina	•		•				•		•				•
	Eleni	•						•		•				•
	Aikaterini	•		•				•	•			•		
	Kyriaki	•					•			•			•	
	Evi	•						•			•			•
	Maria P.	•				•			•			•		
	Evaggelia B.		•					•			•	•		
	Pasxalis	•	•			•			•			•		
	Annita	•	•				•			•	•			•
	Nikos	•		•				•		•	•		•	
	Evangelia		•	•				•			•		•	•
	Aliki						•		•			•		
	Litsa					•					•		•	
<i>Field experience in school classrooms</i>	Eirene	•					•				•			•
	Ourania	•					•				•			•
	Ellen	•			•						•			•
	Rania	•							•			•		
	Paraskevi	•							•			•		
	Basiliki	•									•	•		
	Alexandra	•							•			•		
	Danai	•					•			•				•
	Aspasia	•					•				•			•
	Sotiris	•					•				•			•
	Ioannis	•									•	•		
	Antonia	•										•		
	Alexandros	•								•				
	Stefanos	•								•			•	
	Antonis	•								•		•		
	Marietta	•									•			•
	Georgia	•												
	Giota	•					•				•			•
	Chrysa	•				•				•		•		
	Martha	•					•				•			•
Mideia		•				•				•			•	
Panagiotis		•					•			•	•			
Konstantina		•		•						•			•	
Magdalini		•												
Sevasti		•								•	•			
Ioanna		•								•				

	FORM			FEEDBACK			ACCEPTANC			RECONSTRUCTION			
	Technocratic	Interpretative	Critical	Description	Positive comments	Negative comments	Positive and negative comments	Passivity	Reject/ Defense	Acceptance	No	Implicit	Explicit
Giorgos		•				•				•			•
Stamatina		•								•	•		
Giannis			•			•				•			•
Sophia	•	•				•				•			•
Evita	•	•								•			
Agapi	•	•							•		•		
Stefania	•	•								•			
Christina	•	•						•					
Elissabet	•	•								•		•	
Stella	•	•			•				•	•	•		
Anastasia	•		•	•						•			•
Baso	•		•	•					•		•		
Zoi	•		•			•				•			•
Kiki									•			•	
Eutychia										•			
Ellen						•			•			•	
Eva									•		•		
Dimitris								•					
Biky									•				
Theodoros										•			
Anna										•			
Mary										•			
Kostas										•			
Afrodity								•					
Despoina								•					
Artemis								•					
Maria G.								•			•		
Lia								•					
TOTAL	40	19	8	4	5	16	9	14	18	36	21	9	21

Table 2: Mapping reflective thinking

There were fewer students who tried to analyse their educational process based on theory, while at the same time also taking into account the wider context and their own needs and abilities (*interpretative reflection*). Some characteristic examples of what they said are cited below: "The objectives I set were for the pupils to come into contact with a naturalist text and to recall the concepts of hubris, retribution and nemesis. I set those objectives (a) because they are specified in the curriculum and (b) because I personally consider them to be more important than other objectives which are mentioned" (Stamatina), "I used a variety of methods (e.g. lecturing, discussion, role play, question-answer sessions, demonstrations) to test not just myself to see if I could cope and in which method, but also to see which method would be the most effective depending on the objectives set and the most pleasant for pupils" (Euagelia).

Very few students engaged in *critical reflection* about the planning and implementation of their teaching plans (one example was Aikaterini who said, *"The main objective I set was for pupils to understand the way in which nationalism flourishes in a country when migrants arrive. Moreover, I wanted pupils to realise that we are all different, even if we come from the same country... I believe that the children in high school must come into contact with the concepts of nationalism, racism and xenophobia"*). In an attempt to interpret the fact that only 8 preservice teachers adopted critical reflection when planning their teaching plan, it is worth pointing out that 4 of the 8 preservice teachers who critically reflected on what they were doing had attended a pedagogic training course after they had completed their basic studies. Two of them -Katerina and Aikaterini- were attending at postgraduate course in cross-cultural education and their microteaching sessions were intended to design a teaching plan for a multi-cultural class. In other words they were preservice teachers who already had pedagogic studies, experience from a classroom and in all likelihood personal sensitivities about issues of equality, given that they had opted to study for the specific postgraduate qualification. The other two - Evangelia and Nikos- had a technological background (with studies in computer engineering and mechanical engineering respectively) but they deliberately chose to attend the pedagogic training course and to become teachers, leaving behind their other professional career. Four cases were undergraduate students without any previous studies or professional experience, while a common feature was some of their personal perceptions about teaching and in particular the role of the pupils (e.g. they considered that participation was important and that pupils take the initiative, and that it was important to adapt teaching to the needs of pupils). Of course, it is not feasible to determine the degree of impact of each factor (previous studies, teaching experience, personal perceptions) on student teacher reflective thinking.

Fifteen (15) preservice teachers appeared to have adopted two forms of reflection. It is also worth pointing out that 11 preservice teachers did not appear to have engaged in any form of reflection, but simply designed their teaching plan and implemented it in a mechanistic way.

Clearly it is exceptionally difficult to answer the question of which factors impact on and affect the form of reflection that preservice teachers use. One finding is that the form of reflection is related to the personal perceptions and views of students about teaching. For example, Maria and Eleni, who both used technocratic reflection, provided the following answer to the question "How do you perceive the concept of teaching?": *"The application of a combination of methods, means and materials to achieve teaching objectives", "the teacher tries to achieve specific objectives by following a specific method and form of teaching"*. On the other hand Katerina and Aikaterini, who appeared to have adopted both technocratic and critical reflection, replied to the same question as follows: *"Teaching is a distillation, a piece of oneself given to the pupils depending on their needs and their interests. Utilising pupils' experiences and enriching them", "It is contact with the pupils to transmit not just dry knowledge but values about life. Moreover there is no point in teaching if it does not help the children develop critical thinking, and to learn not to accept everything the mass media, their 'elders', their class mates and school itself say at first hand"*.

What feedback do they receive?

As far as the feedback students received is concerned, it is clear that 34 students did not receive any feedback, in other words they could not assess their teaching and this was ascertained expressly or by not filling out the relevant section of the report. It is worth noting that all such cases were students who engaged in field experience in classrooms, while it would appear that everyone who took part in microteaching sessions received some form of feedback. In fact many of those who took part in microteaching sessions were in a position to identify both the strengths of their teaching and the weaknesses, while all those who took part in field experience in the classroom appear to have focused more on the weaknesses of their teaching, to the point where some cases even expressed feelings of disappointment. This can be attributed to the different way in which both forms of field experience are organised. In microteaching sessions there is direct feedback about strengths and weaknesses in the teaching process from fellow students and supervisors, while in field experience in the classroom some

times the supervisor may not be present during teaching or feedback may be provided in a summary form and not on a systematic basis. However, one can also attribute this difference to the different conditions under which teaching takes place, since in one case the conditions are in a workshop while in the other teaching takes place in a normal classroom where there are more extraneous factors and the teaching process is more complex. It should be noted that four students did not mention the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching, but simply described what they did without any evaluative comments.

Did they accept the comments about their teaching?

There were significant differences in relation to the extent to which students accepted the evaluative comments made by supervisors, fellow students and teachers. A general finding is that less than half the preservice teachers accepted the comments they heard about their teaching, while the rest either ignored or rejected them expressing doubts about their credibility, or taking a defensive stance, attributing any weaknesses in their teaching to extraneous factors.

More specifically, in the case of field experience in ordinary classroom, the students usually accepted the comments of their supervisors and that was because they understood the role of supervisor not as a judge but as an aide in their work. One characteristic example was, *"According to the comments from the supervisors, my teaching had a thread running through it, the tone of my voice was suitable, I gave the pupils incentives and I had an extensive body of materials, and I used a great variety of teaching techniques and methods. The way in which the checklists, work sheets and other papers were written was one of my weaknesses and some times the choice of a large module was a weakness"* (Evangelia). The students who rejected the criticism of their supervisors referred to inadequate support given to them by supervisors when preparing for teaching, and the lack of feedback after teaching was over.

Some students appear to have adopted a passive stance to the feedback they received. Those who dealt with any criticism passively attributed their errors to the lack of time, anxiety and extraneous factors in general, without focusing their attention on the teaching process *per se*. Characteristic examples of this are *"Any deviations are due to the fact that they were adults and it was not necessary to use the dictionary sufficiently as the curriculum required, and I was stressed by the lack of time"*, (Eleni), *"I did not analyse everything I had initially planned, because there was not sufficient time, but the pupils were not as relaxed as in a normal classroom"* (Kyriaki).

Is the end result a revised way of teaching?

The question 'What would you do differently if you had to teach the same thing again?' was intended to explore the extent to which the teaching experience that the students had led them to reflection and certain thoughts about changing their way of teaching. Eighteen (18) students did not answer this specific question at all, possibly because they felt uncomfortable. The comment made by Ioanna is illustrative: *"I don't know. I don't have enough experience yet to say"*.

Of the students who did answer, twenty-one expressly stated that they would change nothing if they had to replan their teaching, which is a response that can be attributed to diverse and different reasons in each case. Maria appears to have utterly rejected the experience of 'field experience' and to have had a negative stance in general, which can be attributed to the nature of field experience (*"I wouldn't change a thing. For me field experience is pointless, since everything is hypothetical"*). Alexandra mentioned that she would not change anything because she felt satisfied with her teaching, not because she considers that further improvements did not need to be made, but because she does not have the highest expectations of herself at the present time (*"I wouldn't change anything. Everything went very well given the level we are currently at"*). Similar cases of students were those where the students considered that they did not need to change anything because they consistently followed the

original plan, while some reached that decision because they only received positive comments from their supervisor or the classroom teacher.

Nine students indicated that they would change their way of teaching but did not mention what they would specifically change or why. Lastly, twenty-one students expressly and clearly stated what exactly they would change in their way of teaching. They normally referred to the use of more audiovisual aids for teaching, the adoption of more participative and group forms of teaching, better time management, and better organisation of the classroom materials. The comments made by Eleni are highly illustrative of the clarity and diverse aspects of the teaching process that were mentioned: *"I would engage in group-focused, cooperative teaching using a dictionary once again. The groups would assume different roles (one would guess the origin of words and the other one would check the dictionary). Moreover, I would add questions that had to be answered in writing, with ideas developed through discussion. I would assign them the task of writing other words used in Greek and other languages that they know. However, I would assign fewer words, because there was not sufficient time"*.

Discussion - Conclusions

To what extent the field experience of preservice teachers contribute to the development of their ability to be reflective?

One initial conclusion arising from the research is that preservice teachers find it difficult during their field experience to reflect on their teaching and when they do so, their reflection focuses on very specific topics. In particular, after teaching is completed preservice teachers reflect on the method used and in particular the methods, forms and means of teaching that they chose, and the didactic objectives they set. Most preservice teachers engaged in technocratic reflection about the planning and implementation of their teaching plans, fewer tried to analyse their educational process based on theory (interpretative reflection) and very few engaged in critical reflection.

Often students are not ready to accept criticism or engage in self-critique about their teaching, probably because it dissolves their self esteem. Moreover, students appear to be defensive or dismissive of the criticism coming from their supervisors, because they consider the instructions given to them before teaching in relation to the expected result are vague, the evaluation criteria are ambiguous and there is insufficient justification provided for any criticism they receive after the end of teaching (similar data arose in a related survey, see Amobi, 2005:128). Students who take a passive stance reject or resist the evaluation of their teaching and then fail to expressly state how they would revise their teaching. On the contrary, when students accept criticism, they appear to have concerns and engage in a process of thinking of ways to improve their teaching.

Under what conditions does the field experience of preservice teachers contribute to developing the ability of teachers to be reflective?

The fact that preservice teachers reflect only on methods, forms and means of teaching and do not reflect on other aspects of the work of a teacher (e.g. classroom management, pupil evaluation, interaction with pupils and between pupils) can be attributed in part to the way that field experience is organised and in particular the duration of work experience. Surveys of students participating in longer spells of field experience show that during the first week reflection focuses on teaching skills and issues of method while concerns gradually expand the more they come into contact with the classroom environment (Lee, 2005). As far as the form of reflection is concerned, it is clear that students tend to focus primarily on their own activities, and that they find it more difficult to interpretatively and even more difficult to think critically.

One question which arises is why some students are more open to comments from fellow students and supervisors than other students, who adopt a passive stance or reject the comments of supervisors?

The content, form, depth and general method of reflection among preservice teachers appears to be affected (a) by the personal profile of each preservice teacher and (b) by the way in which field experience is organised. Consequently, when field experience is being organised and implemented, it is essential to explore and capitalise upon the special features of preservice teachers, their personality, their previous experiences, and their perceptions about their role and the teaching process (Greene & Magliaro, 2005).

Moreover, in order for field experience to contribute to the development of the reflection skills of teachers, the feedback they receive is of decisive importance. In particular, the role of the supervising teachers or 'mentors' is particularly important as is the way in which they approach and make criticism of the teaching done by preservice teachers. The characteristics which make for effective supervisors when it comes to the development of reflective thinking among preservice teachers are excellent knowledge of the subject being taught, the possession of knowledge about how to organise teaching and teaching methods, and knowledge of techniques to facilitate reflection (Richert, 1990). Collaboration either in the form of teaching in pairs or collaboration between the student and the teacher in class can contribute to the feedback required by students. Switching between the roles of teacher and observer, the creation of a framework within which doubts can be expressed and which allows for verbal interaction with another person which promotes the build up of mutual trust and frankness are practices which lead to alternative viewpoints being observed (Hatton & Smith, 1995, Parson & Stephenson, 2005).

Of course, in addition to feedback, reflection among teachers can also be developed based on the general format and organisation of work experience. In particular, it is important to promote reflection via specific pedagogical strategies that contribute to a gradual 'initiation' of preservice teachers into the reflection process (see in this regard Korthagen, 1992, Spalding & Wilson, 2002, Freese, 1999, Minott, 2008). One of these is keeping a journal in which the preservice teachers regularly record over a set period of time thoughts, experiences, personal perceptions which can be (a) utilised to engage in fruitful dialogue with the supervising teacher and (b) used to engage in internal dialogue. Some other conditions which contribute to the development of reflection during field experience are as follows: possession of a body of relevant knowledge, the availability of adequate, clearly demarcated time for reflection on teaching, a sense of security among preservice teachers and release from the fear of evaluation of their teaching per se, observation during teaching, and structured discussion about teaching. However, the most important of all is that there be a context for reflection in relation to those aspects of the teaching processes which preservice teachers can focus their concerns on.

A basic condition, in my opinion, for field experience contributing to the preparation of preservice teachers is that the entire curriculum be underscored by a reflection-based philosophy. The consistency of the overall curriculum is of definitive importance for effective work experience, and especially so when field experience does not aim just to be an exercise in teaching skills but also to develop reflection among the preservice teachers. It is essential that the subjects being taught and the field experience match each other, and that there also be a clear, systematic link between the two, since preservice teachers do not have the adequate degree of maturity to make the connection between theory and praxis themselves.

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