

Reflection as learning about the self in context: mentoring as catalyst for reflective development in pre-service teachers

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Establishing a close alignment between teacher education programmes and the realities of the actual classroom remains a challenge in preparing pre-service teachers at higher education institutions. The literature indicates that reflection is a core quality of effective teachers. We investigate how the development of reflective practice through mentoring programmes can facilitate the inevitable transitions that students have to make to the professional sector. Through a narrative analysis, we report on the insights of a selected group of Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students participating in the initial development phase of a mentoring system during their practice teaching in schools guiding them to reflect critically on their learning and practice. The data suggest that mentoring can act as a catalyst to enhance reflection. The development of reflection as praxis can assist in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Keywords: mentoring; pre-service teacher development; reflection; teacher identity

Teacher learning is the process of reflection and action through which teachers develop skills, and acquire knowledge and expertise.

(Billet, 2001 in Wilson & Demetriou, 2007:214)

Introduction

Pre-service teachers often find the transition from higher education to practice a daunting experience. Students often feel ill-prepared to deal with the uncertainties, realities and challenges that await them in their new profession (Bezzina, 2006). How can higher education institutions support this transition and equip students to deal with the ever-changing scenario of teaching practice? Beck and Kosnik (2002), Boz and Boz (2006), Quick and Siebörger (2005), Seferoğlu (2006), and Wilson and Demetriou (2007) argue that a close alignment of the academic programme with its practical application in an actual classroom through practical experience is essential. Such an integrated approach enables pre-service teachers to place themselves in the learners' position and this is seen to produce more effective teachers who are more likely to enter and remain in education. Although achieving this kind of alignment is quite complicated, it is one of the most important contributions a university can make to the development of pre-service teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

The quality of teaching is attracting increasing attention at national and international levels. Edwards and Nicoll (2006) describe the key issues that drive this trend: a student-centred ethos; increased and widened student participation, which in turn necessitates a reconceptualisation of teaching and learning; curriculum changes; the changing nature of work in the global

context; and the emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness, which demands institutional flexibility. These issues not only confront teacher educators, but also form the basis of their future reality. Students need to be trained and educated to deal as effectively as possible with this complex reality.

Korthagen (2004) ponders the essential qualities of a good teacher and asks how students can become good teachers. Various studies have approached this question from an organisational perspective, including the university (Schulze, 2003) as well as the school (Quick & Siebörger, 2005; Schulman & Schulman, 2004), and taking into account the teacher as mentor (Burgess & Mayes, 2007; Edwards & Collinson, 1996). Another approach to this issue has been to question the current teachers-in-training themselves (Bertram, Appleton, Muthukrishna & Wedekind, 2006; Donche, Vanhoof & Van Petegem, 2003; Lambe & Bones, 2006; Quick & Siebörger, 2005).

We will argue — as do Bezzina (2006), Seferoğlu (2006) and Wilson and Demetriou (2007) — that reflection on professional practice is one of the qualities that characterise a good teacher. It follows that one of the ways in which the prospective teacher can become a proficient teacher is through the development of values, knowledge and skills that support reflection on practice. This means that teacher educators need to create opportunities and facilitate experiences that will develop the pre-service teacher's capacity to reflect on his or her practice. In this article we report on a research initiative to investigate this. It provides a holistic overview of eight Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students' ability to reflect in and on their practice (Schön, 1983) during the initial developmental phases of an in-school mentoring system.

Literature

Korthagen (2004) refers to the development of two distinct schools of thought on teacher education: first, that of a competency-based approach focused on the teaching of, and training in, specific teaching skills and strategies; second, a humanistic approach, focused on the person of the teacher. The latter approach emanates from an understanding that students' preconceptions about teaching and learning are often not understood, recognised or acknowledged by the students themselves, their lecturers, or in-service teachers as mentors — even though these preconceptions may have a decisive impact on the process of learning how to teach (Kukari, 2004). Kukari (2004) furthermore argues that the development of reflection skills may be one way in which to bridge this dichotomy that has evolved in teacher education.

Crucial in establishing the integration between competency and person-focused development is the issue of who controls the field of judgement. Two questions arise which capture the essence of this dilemma:

- To what extent are the student teachers allowed to regulate their own development based on their reflection on their practice and other lived experiences?
- Are students made aware of these issues and how to remain focused on

their growth, primarily embedded in reflection?

Mentoring may be one way to facilitate student reflection in and on practice. Burgess and Mayes (2007); Hurd, Jones, McNamara and Craig (2007) and Remington Smith (2007) recommend a process of joint inquiry between expert and novice teachers to explore and develop ideas on teaching practice. Mentoring in this context means to stimulate reflection in this suggested process of continuing mutual inquiry. Reflection can thus also be used to facilitate students' development of a professional identity (Korthagen, 2004; Pavlovich, 2007).

Teacher identity relates to the core beliefs the teacher has about teaching and being a teacher. These beliefs are interpreted against the backdrop of previously acquired knowledge (Loyens, Rikers & Schmidt, 2007), and developed and reshaped continuously through experience (Walkington, 2005) in different contexts (Wilson & Demetriou, 2007).

Korthagen (2004) also refers to another level of development beyond individual identity — that of mission. Whereas the identity level is concerned with the self, the mission level places the student in relation to others, as being part of something larger than the self. The catalyst for the mission level of reflection is usually a critical incident (Korthagen 2004) — which, in the case of this research project, could take the form of the practice teaching session in schools, when students have their initial exposure to their future professional environment. The development of their teacher mission is not only confined to their relationships with the staff (including mentors) and students, but is inextricably intertwined with the educational ethos of the school as well as national education imperatives. Students need to find their own mission as teachers within this wider environment.

Loyens *et al.* (2007) add a third level — the **meta-cognitive level** — in which students become self-regulated learners capable of knowing how and when to use their knowledge constructed in the previous two levels. Teacher educators may need to focus on creating learning opportunities for students to develop at all three levels, avoiding a singular focus on only academic/technical teaching input (Jones, 2005). However, as Pavlovich (2007) points out, the learning that takes place in developing an identity, a mission and meta-cognitive abilities is both an inward and an outward process. Much of how student teachers develop is informed by input from more knowledgeable agents (Giddens, 1984), but even more of this growth depends on how student teachers bring together their own insights, perspectives and dreams, on the one hand, and the guidance and expectations of all involved in the teacher education process, on the other.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the developmental processes envisioned in the PGCE programme in which this research was located.

Various factors may hamper successful integration of students into the school environment. Pre-service teachers may experience a dissonance that can be attributed to the different logic by which the teaching curriculum is organised in higher education institutions in comparison to the applied logic

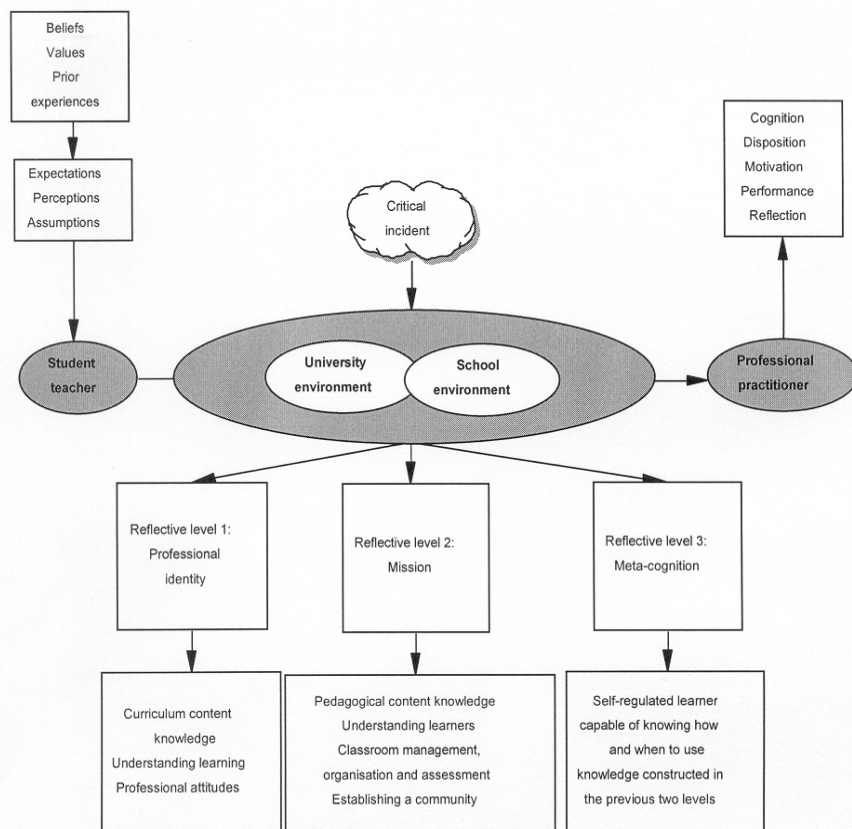


Figure 1 Theoretical framework guiding pre-service teacher development in the PGCE mentoring initiative

used in school curricula (Philpott, 2006). McNay (2003) alludes to issues of power and authority as experienced by pre-service teachers in their practical training. Students' ability to instigate change and/or explore new pedagogies may be inhibited as a result of power imbalances in the professional relationships between pre-service and in-service teachers. Consequently, a balanced power relationship requires in-service teachers who are open to discussion or to being challenged by pre-service teachers.

Teacher education that takes place within schools is especially relevant if we are to consider the development of students' professional identities and

missions (Bezzina, 2006; Boz & Boz, 2006; Burgess & Mayes, 2007; Korthagen, 2004; Moon, 2007). Walkington (2005:56) sees this practice experience as *a basis for challenging and changing ideas*, while Remington Smith (2007) refers to a broader conception of novice-expert relationships in student teaching. The role of in-service teachers as so-called “boundary brokers” in pre-service teachers’ experience of the school environment and the learning that these students experience is noteworthy, but joint enquiry and reflection may enable better co-operation that moves beyond mere mastery of content knowledge towards the development of theories and philosophies of teaching.

The transition from university training to classroom practice may be a daunting experience for which students are often inadequately prepared. Consequently it is not strange that Philpott (2006) emphasises the roles of both in-service teachers as mentors and of university lecturers who liaise with schools in clarifying the expected experience for pre-service teachers during the practice teaching period.

Hurd *et al.* (2007) stress that such a process needs to form part of day-to-day routines and be owned by all stakeholders concerned. In this way this research project encapsulates what Kraak (2000:iii) calls a “shift away from [universities’] traditional liberal formulation as a ‘house of knowledge’ — detached from the larger society ... towards a conception of a university in service of the market”, which in this case is the schools where our students do their practical teaching. The question now arises as to the extent to which a mentoring system with reflection as a key strategy can assist in making this experience less daunting and help students to bridge the gap between lecture hall and classroom.

Methodology

In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the intrinsic and pedagogical aspects of such a system, a mentoring partnership with a limited group of in-service teachers in three selected schools was established. This initial partnership forms part of a greater project to develop university-school partnerships that are mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. These partnerships include researchers as well as teacher educators, students as pre-service teachers, the in-service teachers as mentors, as well as the school as a teaching and learning community. An open-ended process-oriented approach was followed, because several authors (Bezzina, 2006; McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins, 2007; Moon, 2007; Stronach & McNamara, 2002; Wilson & Demetriou, 2007) warn that institutional partnerships are best seen as work in progress without pre-established outcomes for varying contexts.

Our purpose in this article is to analyse and describe the perspectives of a selected group of South African PGCE students who took part in the initial development phase of a mentoring system during their practice teaching in schools. A qualitative approach was adopted through a narrative analysis of students’ reflections (explained later in this section) and focus group interviews with these students to provide insights into the development of students’ abilities to reflect critically on their learning and practice. The aim

is to understand how the development of reflective practice through mentoring by in-service teachers can facilitate the inevitable transitions students have to make to the professional sector.

The sample consisted of eight students (out of a total of 95) purposively selected to take part in establishing a mentoring system. The rationale behind the identification of the schools involved in the project was the inclusion of schools typically found in the post-1994 South African education system.¹ Eventually only three schools were selected (there were no schools from the former House of Delegates in the sample and no students indicated their choice to do their teaching practice at a school from the former Department of Education and Training). We conducted a narrative analysis of the students' feedback obtained through focus group interviews and the open-ended questionnaires that they were required to complete.

Two focus group interviews with all the participating students were conducted — the first one a week before and a second one a week after the school visit. Guided reflection, as described by Schön (1983), was used to facilitate students' reflection during these focus group interviews, especially since they were still only embarking on their teaching careers as novices. The questions used during these focus group interviews were intended to help the students to reflect on their expectations prior to the school visit, to facilitate constructive reflection while in practice and to reflect on practice afterwards.

In the focus group interview prior to the school visit, the following set of questions guided the deliberations:

- What are your fears and expectations regarding the school visit?
 - What do you think would make the school visit the best experience?
 - How do you see the role and functions of the teacher as a mentor?
 - How do you see your own role within this context of mentorship?
 - What would the benefits and disadvantages of a mentoring system be?
- The questions that guided the reflective process after the school visit were:
- How did you experience the programme without having pre-determined specific outcomes and a fixed structure for the mentoring relationship?
 - How did you experience the process in the light of the minimum visits by the project team members (authors)?
 - Of what value was your involvement in this project for you specifically?
 - What in the process worked and did not work?
 - What are the future possibilities of such a project?
 - Any general comments?

Each of the researchers asked a specific question or questions. Having more than one person leading the interview proved effective as the 'conversation' enhanced the interaction within the group and bolstered the attempt to elicit nuanced and 'thick' information about the students' perceptions, feelings and ideas about the mentoring process. A scribe was used in both focus group interviews to record all verbal responses in writing as accurately as possible. There were two reasons for using a scribe rather than a tape recorder. Firstly, it became clear that students were hesitant about the idea of being recorded.

Secondly and more importantly, the scribe not only recorded the students' responses, but also their non-verbal communication, which revealed feelings such as fear, uncertainty, trust and excitement.

In analysing the students' narratives, the researchers worked actively to situate the voice of the participant in a particular time, place or setting (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) in an attempt to understand the nature of this meaning-giving process and how the students had developed as professionals during the practice teaching session in collaboration with, and under the guidance of their mentors. The choice of voice (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 301) and the presence of the researchers in creating the narrative is justified by what Pillay (2005:540) refers to as the researchers' "story of others' stories" and Tierney's (2002: 392) notion of narrative reflexivity. The narrative process therefore enabled the students to begin to restory and reconstruct their lives in this particular teacher education setting based upon their recollections and statements about their own feelings and perspectives. This also allowed students to critically reflect on their earlier or current perspectives in order to construct or reconstruct the meaning of their professional development.

Each student's story was analysed using a framework that allowed the researchers to examine what Lauritzen and Jaegar (1997:35) call the "requirements of story: setting, characters, action directed toward goals ...". In the context of this research project — the latter dimension embodied emerging threads (or narrative threads, as explained by Nieuwenhuis, 2007) — an understanding of student perceptions (reflection and development of identity with a focus on the self, their mission and on progress to a meta-cognitive level) was sought from the students' own point of view. Using these lenses helped to filter the generalisable essence from the narratives.

The choice of the specific sample played an important role in ensuring trustworthiness, as the sample is an important mechanism to ensure the trustworthiness of the research (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2005: 203-208; Denscombe, 2003:12-13). This project used purposive sampling as a nonprobability sampling strategy. The sample was typical of the population (see Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). These authors (2006: 139) state that nonprobability samples are more than adequate for research purposes as small non-random samples can be studied in-depth and provide rich information for research purposes. In this study it was possible to do such in-depth analysis of the small nonrandom sample in order to reach trustworthy conclusions. Although the data cannot be generalised to the whole population, it is trustworthy within the specific context in which it was investigated. As the conclusions are tested in other contexts in future, the external validity might increase and the confidence in the theory might grow (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006:140). Triangulation further enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. The data, generated during the initial and the follow-up deliberations with the sample groups (both teachers and students) at the start and the end of the study, were verified by not only comparing them with the detailed notes made by the scribe during the

deliberations, but also with the data generated by means of questionnaires. The triangulated data thus contributed to validity and trustworthiness of the deductions and conclusions, but the small sample size in the study limits the generalization of the results.

A number of steps were taken throughout the research project to ensure an acceptable level of consideration of the ethical issues. Prior to the launch of the project, consent was obtained from the principals and teachers of the participating schools, as well as from the participating students. This was done by means of personal meetings with these stakeholders during which the goal, procedures and methodology were discussed and approved. The researchers also undertook to maintain the anonymity of the individuals involved through using labels such as “School A” and “Student A1”. The intention was also to mask the name and location of the school communities; however, the area in which our participating schools are situated is relatively small and the identities of these communities may be obvious to knowledgeable readers.

Results and discussion

Contextualisation

The practice teaching session consists of a full school term (about 11 weeks) in the second semester of the academic year of the one-year PGCE programme. The aim of this extended teaching practice period is not only to deepen students’ practical base, but also to create space where they can reflect on the integration of their theoretical understanding, their lived experience and what they experience in practice — thus the development of a mission (Korthagen, 2004). This integration can be enhanced if the participating teachers fulfil their roles as mentors. But does this happen? Do the students really develop their own identity; do they move beyond their own identity (mission) and do they eventually progress to a meta-cognitive level (Loyens *et al.*, 2007)?

Phillipot *et al.* (2006) emphasise that teachers need to take ownership of the mentorship process. The collaboration of the teachers in the project was seen as a high priority. As the mentorship programme would be steered by reflective practice, the intention was not to specify any rules, regulations and expectations for the teachers; this enabled aspects such as the perceptions of teachers, the nature and scope of the mentorship process, the way that teachers could be prepared and whether true integration between theory and practice did indeed take place to be addressed. The teachers were consulted throughout the process in order to create trust and synergy, even though only the students’ input is used for the purposes of this article.

Background of schools and students in the project

In order to understand the context in which the study was conducted, a brief overview of the various school contexts and students involved is provided.

School A was established in 1979, *inter alia* to provide education to learners classified as ‘coloured’ according to the Population Registration Act (South Africa, 1950). The Afrikaans-medium public school serves “a clientele

of socio-economically disadvantaged learners of the lowest income group". A survey done by the Stellenbosch Municipality (2005:29-30) indicated that 23.9% of the residents where the school is situated have no income, while 11.1% of those who have an income earn between R401.00 and R800.00 per month. This socio-economic situation limits the ability of the school to provide an environment in which learners can reach their full potential. The following biographies provide an insight into the student teachers who did their practice teaching at this school:

- Student A1 was a white Afrikaans-speaking male. In his undergraduate studies he specialised in language and culture. His practice teaching both within the university micro-teaching context and at the school itself exposed definite shortcomings. He seemed to cling to the type of teaching style that he had grown accustomed to during his own schooling — one lecturer commented that his presentation was an example of a typical lesson from a previous (pre-1994) paradigm.
- Student A2 was a coloured Afrikaans-speaking female who specialised in languages and social sciences. Her lesson evaluations from both teachers (mentors) as well as lecturers reported a number of pedagogical issues that needed attention. However, they all indicated that she showed the potential to become a competent teacher.
- Student A3 was a white Afrikaans-speaking female who also specialised in languages and social sciences. Although she initially struggled during her micro-teaching sessions on campus, she showed improvement during the practice teaching session at the school.

School B is a public school situated in a previously advantaged community. This dual-medium school is well resourced — not only in terms of human capital, but also in terms of monetary capital. This situation is evident from the principal's report for 2008, which states that the parent community approved a loan of R10.25 million for extensions to the school — despite the fact that under the new South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (Department of Education, 1996) the state has reduced its financial support to schools like School B. The consistent annual increase of the number of 'A' aggregates and percentage of candidates passing with matriculation exemption may indicate a high standard of teaching and a positive learning atmosphere. The following students did their practice teaching at School B:

- Student B1 was a white Afrikaans-speaking male who majored in Sports Science and Psychology. His command of, and fluency in, English helped him to develop a good rapport with learners and teachers at the school. Reports from the school and curriculum speciality lecturers indicated that he already showed high levels of competence as a teacher.
- Student B2 was an English-speaking female who specialised in her undergraduate studies in English and Theatre Studies. She initially struggled during micro-teaching and the initial phases of the school visit, but improved steadily. One assessor commented that the student initially lacked an understanding of teaching circumstances and requirements,

but was quick to learn.

School C is an independent day/boarding school for 650 girls and boys from Grade R to Grade 12. Given their 100% pass rate to date in the Independent Examination Board examinations, an effective level of teaching is provided. The school has strong Art, Drama and Music departments, which are supported by a local theatre. With the donation of land and the financial means of the parent community, it is possible to continuously improve the comprehensive range of facilities at the school to enable it to become one of the best-resourced education facilities in the province. The following three PGCE students did their practice teaching at this school:

- Student C1 was a white English-speaking female who showed great potential as a prospective teacher. Her lecturers and teacher mentors identified minor areas in her practice that needed attention. She received a glowing report from teachers at the school: “Her dedication, intelligence and manner make her a fine teacher”.
- Student C2 was a white Afrikaans-speaking female specialising in Arts and Drama. With the School C being an English-medium school, she was placed in a very difficult situation as an Afrikaans mother-tongue speaker. However, her enthusiasm, creativity, ability to relate to the learners and willingness to learn helped her to overcome this challenge.
- Student C3 was an English-speaking white male who specialised in Commerce subjects. According to the evaluation reports, during both micro-teaching sessions at the university and during the practice session, he may be regarded as a ‘natural teacher’. Although his outstanding ability to interact with learners helped to establish a good rapport with them, he experienced that being ‘too nice’ may lead to learners taking advantage of his good nature.

The diversity in both school contexts and student backgrounds is evident from these descriptions, which provide the backdrop to the following discussion on the narrative analysis.

Narrative analysis

Reflection and the development of identity: the self

As mentioned, the teaching practice period offers a space in which student teachers can develop their own as well as a professional identity. These components form part of the self, which includes their beliefs about teaching against the backdrop of their acquired and required knowledge and skills (Loyens *et al.*, 2007; Walkington, 2005). Based on the students’ reflections, it emerged that in-depth development of teacher identity seemed to be lacking in a few cases. Evidence shows that the development of the students’ teacher identity was not established soundly enough up to the level where it guided their actions. They still depended primarily on their mentors’ support to the extent that they were impressed with the guidance they received on how lessons should be taught and what the duties and responsibilities of a teacher were. This emerged from comments such as:

... my mentor gave me enough support where I needed help ... ; she gave me help and guidance ...; explained what was good and what he would have changed ...; assisted me in preparing for the lessons ... (Student A3)
... I mainly had to return tests or comprehensions or instruct learners to do comprehensions ... (Student B2)

The analysis of the narrative comments also showed that students reflected on their experiences on the basis of their perception of what they regarded as important for them to do as prospective teachers. One student made the comment that *I marked many tests and was barely given any opportunity to teach anything which would benefit me as a teacher* (Student B2), while Student C3 stated that the mentoring relationship *creates somewhat of a dependency on the teacher and the individuality of the student teacher can't be fully exercised*. This last comment may indicate that the development of her identity (and consequent ability to reflect) was thwarted by the mentoring that took place. However, in this comment itself lies a specific belief and conception of herself-as-a-teacher — a clear indication that she has already developed her own teacher identity. This awareness stems from the meaning students make of their new profession, which supports them in making related decisions (Bullough, 1997).

Students' reference to aspects that would benefit them as teachers and aspects such as that the *individuality of the student teacher can't be fully exercised* (Student C3) may indicate that the practice teaching session confirmed what they believed their teaching role should be. So their perspectives on their teacher identities were further endorsed, despite references to concerns or fears that they would not be able to develop an individual teaching persona, as the data from the focus group discussions before the practice teaching session indicate. These insights may have moulded their teacher identity and should not be seen in a negative light.

Student B2 commented on an experience where she was forced to teach a subject which was not her first choice and which consequently — according to her — created tension. Even though this did not seem to impact negatively on her learning experience, she thought this tension could have been avoided. In another school Student A3 had two completely different kinds of experiences with the two teachers who acted as mentors for her two school subjects. One mentor expected her to just take over all his classes. The experience of the student was that this situation *really robbed [her] in terms of learning within the greater sense*. The other mentor played a much more supportive role and created opportunities to *do my own thing*. In other words, the student could move on to the meta-cognitive level and regulate her own learning and development.

Student C1, on the other hand, commented that she did not feel *like a following puppy*, as the mentor teacher was flexible and created enough opportunities for her to regulate her own learning. The student reported that this type of mentoring relationship helped them to *gel together and worked as it felt comfortable for [them]*. Embedded in these statements are issues of

power(lessness) and authority. When mentors unilaterally dictated how the mentoring relationship should unfold, students felt that learning through practice becomes something that is done to them and not with them. To students it was as if they were excluded from the process(es) from which they should learn — whether they made mistakes or performed excellently. Other students reported mentor relationships where they were given the opportunity to be part of the process of planning the term's work. In these situations students felt that they had the power to raise their expectations and they had the authority to negotiate the nature of the mentoring relationship. In circumstances like this students felt that they were given the space to give their best, to make mistakes and in so doing take ownership of the process to regulate their development as teachers.

Perhaps even these negative experiences contributed to, and moulded, the students' identity. One could deduce that the students themselves believed that they should not be over-dependent on others, but that they should have the freedom to regulate their own learning. These experiences forced students to reflect on their experiences while their identity was shaped as well. They had particular views on the role of a mentor and this contributed to their identity development.

Reflection and the development of identity: mission

With regard to the mission level, there is evidence that this element was present in the development of students' identity. Most of the students' responses bear evidence that they felt part of something larger than the self in that they came to understand that their teaching in a specific subject formed part of a greater educational context. Responses that were indicative of this understanding included:

Everyone at the school was more than prepared to sit with you to answer all your questions (Student C1).

It [the mentoring relationship] helped me to feel at home in the school ...; what the systems of the school were (Student B1).

I learnt a lot about the school system in the greater context (Student B2).

I really learned a lot from the school and I was handled as one of the staff (Student C2).

The school visit as a critical incident contributed to the development of the mission level of identity development. Evidence shows that the students indeed felt part of the greater school context and it influenced the development of their identity. This project thus sensitised students to the fact that, as teachers, they could not function alone and that their identities were shaped and moulded through the context.

Reflection and the development of identity: meta-cognitive level

There is evidence that in some cases students did indeed move towards the meta-cognitive level of identity formation, but the data did not provide overwhelming evidence that this level of identity formation was fully achieved in

all cases. Student C1 claimed that because the project was not specifically structured and that they had a lot of freedom, *I did not feel like a following puppy and that I could come and go as I please*. The student seemed to have the freedom to plan her curriculum for her classes without being constantly monitored. In this way she had the space to develop and regulate her own learning. An earlier comment by the same student that *being at home in the school made me more prepared for the lessons I had to present* also bears evidence of this self-regulatory process. It can be suggested that if students feel secure and are allowed to make certain decisions, this may enhance the establishment of a context or space in which they will start to regulate their actions and decisions themselves.

The ideal would be that students also reach the meta-cognitive level of identity development despite the critical incident spanning only a relatively short period of about 11 weeks. As such, they should show evidence of this in their becoming self-regulating learners, capable of knowing how and when to use their knowledge constructed in the previous two levels. The project team acted as the external force to facilitate the opportunity for identity development, but the outcome also depended on the role of the mentor teachers and the ability of the students to react to, and engage with, learning opportunities.

Dissonance

The data provided evidence that some students experienced dissonance during their school visit. This particular aspect was not investigated further, so the actual impact of the dissonance was not determined. Interestingly, though, the reported dissonance was not so much between what is expected by the higher education institution, on the one hand, and what is required by the school, on the other hand, but rather seemed related to power issues within a specific school.

Some students clearly experienced dissonance. Despite close liaison and collaboration with the schools on the project, a “mentor” in one school required a student to mark his assignments, tests and compositions during at least 10 of the 11 weeks. Another mentor expected Student B2 to take over all his classes, which *really robbed [her] in terms of learning within the greater sense*. Dissonance manifested itself differently in different contexts — with reference to the earlier discussion, where a student was forced to teach a subject that was not her first choice and another student had two distinctly different experiences with the two appointed mentor teachers.

Dissonance in both situations may be attributed to the different logic by which the mentors organised the practice teaching session for the students involved. The mentors’ logic may have differed from what the students expected and were told at the university that they could expect. The project team did not visit the schools regularly (because of the open process followed), which may have created the opportunity for practices such as those reported above. Professional induction, as described by Quick and Siebörger (2005), was left to the discretion of the schools for the purposes of the initial phase

of the project. However, in our view, dissonance is not necessarily a negative aspect of the practice teaching session, as such experiences could also contribute to the development of teacher identity and of mission. Dissonance may have forced the students to reflect on the situation and the learning to be gained from it. Dissonance may also have facilitated students' critical reflection on the expected learning outcomes to be gained from the practice teaching experience, as suggested by Philpott (2006).

Conclusion

From the data generated one can deduce that reflection is indeed a process where students learn about the self in context and that mentoring can act as a catalyst to enhance this learning process. It is clear that the transition from theory to practice is enhanced and optimised by using a mentoring system, as there are appropriate support mechanisms in place. The value of a mentor system is that it focuses not only on developing appropriate competences, but also has a strong humanist element in that it concentrates on the person of the student teacher. However, participating school-based mentors might not have been aware of the meaningfulness or purpose of mentoring as a process and their possible lack of understanding, might have negatively influenced their roles as mentors. This is a possible limitation to the study.

The three levels of reflection cannot be seen in isolation from one another, because the development of one level does impact on the other. The development of a professional identity (curriculum knowledge, an understanding of learning/ professional attitudes) does impact on the extent to which students integrate this pedagogical content knowledge into their view of the broader learning environment (how they see learners, how they manage classrooms, how they see the broader context of the school, and how they interact with the broader school community of teachers, parents and learners). This again can contribute to self-regulated learning in that they enable themselves to know how and when to use knowledge constructed on the previous two levels. These levels of reflection should not be seen as cyclical, but rather as a continuum.

Although there was no evidence of an overly striking development of teacher identity, there were indications that student teachers reflected on what they thought the role and function of a professional teacher should be. They could relate to their roles within a larger context (mission) and they started to regulate their own learning (although not to the extent that one would have expected). Even where there were instances of dissonance, this also actually created opportunities for learning and the development of their identity as well as placing themselves within a particular learning environment. Overall one could state that developing reflection as a practice can assist in bridging the gap between lecture hall (theory) and classroom (practice).

What does the future hold for further entrenching reflective practice in this particular PGCE programme? This is indeed a crucial question in the constant quest for quality and coherence within the whole PGCE programme, with its emphasis on a student-centred ethos that guides teacher educators' actions. Based on these initial findings, a logical and responsible way forward

may be to extend the mentoring programme by coupling more pre-service teachers with teachers-in-practice, in the hope that more productive spaces will be created that will further facilitate reflective practice for all parties involved.

Note

1. Prior to 1994 the SA education system was racially divided into the House of Representatives (coloureds), The House of Delegates (Indians), House of Assembly (whites) and Department of Education and Training (blacks).

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