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AUTHOR Bouas, Jean; Thompson, Patricia
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ABSTRACT

A reflective thinking model has been developed by reading/language arts faculty at Northwest Missouri State University to provide opportunity for elementary education majors to think reflectively about their teaching and to determine ways to improve their instructional practices. During a 7-week reading/language arts practicum experience, preservice teachers watch a video of their teaching and conference with the practicum supervisor, respond in writing to scripting notes taken by a practicum supervisor of a recently taught lesson, complete three reflective thinking protocols, and complete the same summative evaluation checklist used by the supervising teachers. A research study was conducted by one of the authors in 1994 and replicated by both authors in 1999-2000. Students anonymously responded to a five-item Likert Scale and participated in structured interviews. The intent was to analyze preservice teachers' perceptions of the reflective thinking processes used during the required practicum. Of the 51 students enrolled in four sections of the 1999-2000 Practicum, 30 participated in post-class interviews regarding the self-assessment processes. Procedures were as in the earlier study. Major themes/topics which emerged were: there was an increase in confidence/comfort level; teacher feedback was helpful; self-assessment was valued; writing aided in self-assessment; and lack of teaching time negatively impacted the reflective thinking protocol process. Researchers are convinced that they should not abandon the reflective thinking expectations for their students and for themselves. Mean scores to the responses on the Likert Scale and themes that emerged in the interview data support this conclusion. (Appended are the interview guide, Likert Scale process, reflective thinking protocol, scripting notes, practicum checklist, evaluation conference discussion items, Likert Scale rating mean score, and procedures for analyzing qualitative data.) (NKA)

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**Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Thinking
Practices Used in a Reading/Language Arts
Practicum Experience:
A Study with Cross-Cultural Implications**

a paper presentation by

Jean Bouas
Associate Professor
Northwest Missouri State University
233 Brown Hall
Maryville, MO 64468
Phone 660-563-1771 (W)
660-582-3149 (H)
Fax 660-562-1992
E-mail: Jbouas@mail.nwmissouri.edu

and

Patricia Thompson
Assistant Professor
Northwest Missouri State University
138 Brown Hall
Maryville, MO 64468
660-562-1775 (W)
660-582-6322 (H)
E-mail: Pthom@mail.nwmissouri.edu

for the

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Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Thinking Practices Used in a Reading/Language Arts Practicum Experience: A Study with Cross-Cultural Implications

According to the National Board of Professional Standards (USA), one criteria of outstanding teachers is that they engage in frequent self-assessment. Studies have shown that helping teachers at all stages of development establish self-assessment processes enables them to better understand and control their own learning and teaching practices. A reflective thinking model has been developed by reading/language arts faculty at Northwest Missouri State University, a regional midwestern university (USA), to provide ample opportunity for elementary education majors to think reflectively about their teaching and to determine ways to improve their instructional practices. During a seven week reading/language arts practicum experience, preservice teachers are required to watch a video of their teaching and conference with the practicum supervisor, respond in writing to scripting notes taken by a practicum supervisor of a recently taught lesson, complete three reflective thinking protocols, and complete the same summative evaluation checklist used by the supervising teachers (cooperating teachers and university supervisors).

A challenge facing teacher educators is how to help novices value reflective practice. Self-assessment/reflective thinking processes must be valued if they are to serve a useful function. A research study was conducted by one of the presenters in 1994 (Bouas & Gile, 1997) and was replicated by both presenters in 1999-2000. Students anonymously responded to a 5-item Likert Scale and participated in a structured interview. The intent of the research was to analyze preservice teachers' perceptions of the reflective thinking processes (listed above) used during the required reading/language arts practicum. Findings from the 1994 data revealed that preservice teachers felt the self-assessment processes guided them to think critically about their teaching effectiveness and helped them identify ways to improve their instructional practices. Data from the two studies will be used by reading/language arts faculty in improving the teacher education program.

Thirty of the fifty-one students enrolled in four sections of the 1999-2000 Reading and Language Arts Practicum agreed to participate in a post-class interview (Appendix A) regarding the self-assessment processes. As with the earlier study, interviews were taped and transcribed and a descriptive-interpretive analysis procedure (Tesch, 1990) was used to code segments of text. Subjects also responded to a 5-Item Likert scale survey (Appendix B) on which they rated the effectiveness of the following tools used to facilitate reflective thinking: videotape, video conference, reflective thinking protocols (Appendix C), scripting notes (Appendix D), and performance based evaluation checklist (Appendix E). Students also were asked to respond to an open-ended questionnaire at the end of the practicum (Appendix F). Descriptive statistics related to the Likert scale were triangulated with the qualitative interview data.

Using Tesch's procedure (Appendix H) for organizing and analyzing qualitative data, the interview data was segmented into meaning units that stood alone. Each individual segment of text contained one idea, episode or piece of information. Text segments were coded and organized according to one of the following groups: major topics, unique topics that were important to the research purpose in spite of their rarity, and leftovers (of interest but occurring in less than four of the interviews). These three groups of text segments were analyzed for emerging themes. The major topics/themes were: increased confidence/comfort level, concrete evidence, teacher feedback helpful, self-assessment valued by students, writing aided self-assessment, and lack of teaching time negatively impacted the reflective thinking protocol process. The important but rare topics/themes were: liked comparing ratings on self-evaluation checklist, faculty encouragement in the reflection process, reflective thinking protocol process provoked awareness of adjustments/flexibility, video aided goal setting, stopping video and discussing segments helpful. The leftover topics/themes were: uncertainty/lack of clarity regarding checklist, video taping made practicum student nervous, scripting notes more work than beneficial, growth would have occurred without reflective exercises.

There was unanimous agreement among the interviewees regarding the value of the self-assessment strategies (Appendix G). Students acknowledged that they were “forced” or “made” to think about what they were doing and why they were doing certain things as teachers. The self-assessment procedures facilitated an awareness of strengths and weaknesses. Students made decisions about changes they would make to improve teaching effectiveness. It was interesting to note that all participants felt they had grown in confidence and comfort level with teaching during the practicum. Most expressed belief that this growth would not have occurred without the self-assessment processes. Students spoke primarily about generic effective teaching behaviors, i.e., planning, organization, classroom management, and variety but did not discuss pedagogy of literacy instruction, the writing process, the reading-writing connection, guided reading, reading strategies, the Language Experience Approach.

In the 1994 study, all the interviewees commented that at times the writing was difficult for them to do. Some acknowledged that they really did not like having to write about their teaching; however, in the same sentences describing their uncomfortableness with the writing, students acknowledged the benefit of “being made to think” about their practices. The writing provided a medium of communication to explain oneself to the supervisor and to ask for information, clarification or guidance. Interestingly, in the 1999-2000 study, students indicated a more positive attitude toward the writing expectancy. They seem to value the writing as a means to focus their thoughts. Findings from the 1994 and 1999-2000 studies affirm the value of having practicum students engage in reflective writing and other self-assessment activities to challenge preservice teachers to focus on teacher actions and student involvement. These studies appear to be helping students construct knowledge about teaching. The following quote describing the benefit of the reflective thinking protocols illustrates how the writing aided student self-assessment.

Those (the reflective thinking protocols) were interesting. I guess I have never had a practicum that really got me thinking the way this one has. They were good because I had to sit down and think about my lesson, state my objectives, and go through what we did and then decide was it good or was it bad. I did that on a daily basis and it kind of opened my eyes to some of the things that work and some of the things that don't work. (SS9906)

Changes were made in the reflective thinking protocols (Appendix C) as a result of the 1994 study. While the intent was to guide preservice teachers to consider purposes of teaching and learning activities, it was found that novices were so concerned with planning activities that they often gave little attention to the substantive and qualitative purpose of the learning experiences. Since this was a reading and language arts practicum, it was hoped preservice teachers would focus on how the objectives/purposes, the environment and learning experience activities facilitated growth in literacy. Results indicate that students did not focus on how teaching was facilitating literacy growth as much as was hoped. None of the major themes in the qualitative data in the 1994 or 1999-2000 study dealt specifically with literacy instruction and literacy learning. As a result of this finding in the 1994 study, the third column of the protocol for the 1999-2000 study asked this question: "What did you learn about literacy learning and literacy instruction?" The intent of this question was to encourage students to reflect on literacy learning, i.e., how teaching objectives and procedures facilitate literacy development and how children learn through reading and writing. While the students, since 1994, discussed literacy issues in their protocols, only four of the 1999-2000 subjects discussed specifics about literacy instruction during the interview. The following quote from one of the four students reflects their ability to discuss literacy learning:

I think the part that made us think about what we learned about literacy and structure was important because there we had to put into words and really think about what we had actually learned that week and how important it is to have a purpose when you are having younger children read. This is especially true with younger kids because they aren't used to just reading for information. It really sets that before them before they begin reading so they know exactly what they are looking for. And, it just makes you focus on the literacy instruction. F9905

Because students' responses in the interview data focused on teacher concerns, it became apparent that the preservice teachers needed more scaffolding to guide them to focus on children's learning. Siu-Runyan (1995) advocated that supervisors focus on what learners are doing as part of the supervision process rather than just looking at what the teacher is doing. The nineteen students who were interviewed in the spring of 2000, from the third and fourth sections of the practicum, were asked to describe how the reflective thinking processes aided their knowledge and understanding of how to help children grow in their literacy development (See question 5 on Appendix A). Interestingly, only three of the subjects interviewed in spring 2000 spoke directly to the question. Again the remaining subjects spoke in very global terms about generic pedagogical concerns, e.g., adapting techniques to accommodate individual differences, what worked well, what didn't work well, etc.

According to Jadallah (1996) "knowledge about teaching is constructed and reconstructed through the reflective analysis of experiences." Believing this to be true, we are going to make a better effort to coax, coerce, and coach reflective analysis. We will recommend to the literacy instruction faculty that the following prompt on the reflective thinking protocol be changed: "What did you learn about literacy learning and literacy instruction?" The suggested replacement prompt is "Identify and describe a literacy instruction principle or strategy you used this week. Explain how it was used and to what extent it influenced students' literacy development." Devick says (1998)

It is important for the reflective educator to always ask students to substantiate their ideas.... By providing a rationale for their ideas, students are learning to validate their own judgments and strengthen their own voices. Again, it is the teacher's responsibility to scaffold a student if their opinion does not represent sound and effective instructional principles. It is through the scaffolding experiences that preservice teachers continue to reflect about their practices. (p.4)

We are convinced that we should not abandon the reflective thinking expectations for our students and for ourselves. The mean scores to the responses on the Likert Scale (Appendix G) and themes that emerged in the interview data support our conclusion. Even though the processes are time consuming for the practicum students and us, implications are that teacher educators can use structured reflective thinking processes as a collaborative forum for clarifying literacy instruction theories and improving pedagogical competence.

While supervisors would like to always have the opportunity for pre- and post-observation conferences, adequate time is not always available because of campus teaching and service responsibilities. Also, the number of practicum students being supervised by each supervisor is a concern. The self-assessment activities seem to be a way to probe thinking which enables preservice teachers to make informed instructional decisions. The videotape, student writing, and supervisor written feedback appear to scaffold reflective self-assessment.

Cole and Knowles (1995) state that during a clinical experience, the supervisor has the opportunity to facilitate teacher development by encouraging critical reflection and inquiry in the broad spectrum of experiences. These strategies suggest that in order for the benefit to occur, teacher educators should structure the reflective thinking expectations so that preservice teacher are channeled to recognize and identify the authentic value of studying their own experiences. Eby (1997) asserts "reflective thinking is made up of many elements and reflects an individual's willingness to explore, be curious, and be assertive to gain self-awareness, self-knowledge, and new understandings of the world. It is not something that occurs easily for most of us and it takes time to develop" (p. 10). We believe these self-assessment strategies could be used in any culture where attention is given to guiding preservice teachers to analyze and improve their own teaching practices.

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Preservice Teachers Perceptions of Self-assessment Processes used during an Eight-week Reading and Language Arts Practicum

1. Describe how you felt about the use of the videotape and the follow-up conference.

Probes:

- a. What did you learn about yourself as a teacher?
- b. Discuss the usefulness or non-usefulness of the videotape in helping you identify and/or clarify strengths and weaknesses in your teaching of reading and the other language arts. (Probe the interviewee to make a judgment one way or the other—useful or non-useful and to provide a rationale for the response.)
- c. What are your perceptions of how you were encouraged to assess your teaching during the videoconference?

2. You were directed to review the scripting notes for the announced observation and to write your personal reflections. Describe how you felt about this post-reflection.

Describe how you felt about this post-reflection activity as a means to help you assess your teaching.

3. Discuss the pros and cons of having to complete three reflective thinking protocols.

What factors or conditions that are critical to successful teaching were brought to your consciousness as a result of having to do this three weeks in a row?

4. Discuss how completing a final self-evaluation using the practicum performance based checklist used by the cooperating teaching and the practicum supervisor was of help or not of help to you in understanding your growth and development as a teacher.
5. How did the reflective thinking processes aid your knowledge and understanding of how to help children grow in their literacy development?
6. How do you feel you have grown as a teacher during the practicum experience?
7. In your opinion, would the same growth/development have occurred without the self-assessment processes used by the practicum supervisor? Why or why not?

Likert Scale Rating of Self-Assessment Process

Directions: Rate each of the processes used during your Reading and Language Arts Practicum in terms of their effectiveness in facilitating self-assessment. Use a scale of 1-5. 1="strongly disagree" and 5="strongly agree."

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Watching the videotape enabled me to identify strengths and weaknesses in my teaching. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. The questions asked of me by the practicum supervisor during the videoconference were helpful in leading me to reflect on aspects of myself as a teacher that I may not otherwise have considered at this stage in my development. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Writing reflections in relation to the scripting notes led me to analyze teaching episodes more carefully than I would have if I had not been expected to engage in written self-reflection. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Completing the reflective thinking protocols enabled me to identify factors and conditions that are critical if I, as a teacher, am to realize positive outcomes in my teaching. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Completing a final self-evaluation using the same practicum performance based checklist used by my supervisor and my cooperating teacher cause me to have a better understanding of my stage of development than I would have if only the cooperating teacher and the supervisor had shared their evaluations with me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Name: _____ I.D. #: _____

Reflective Thinking Protocol

Date: _____

BE SURE THAT YOU ALWAYS ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION IN COLUMN THREE: How did you adjust the lesson during the teaching/learning process?

II. Learning Episode that Progressed Smoothly With Positive Outcomes

<p>Objective: Desired Learning Outcome(s) This is not a description of the activities. It is a statement of outcomes. Is objective relevant and age appropriate?</p>	<p>Summary of your planned instructional process. (Think about what children will be doing.)</p>	<p>How do you feel about what actually happened? What conditions/factors contributed to a successful outcome?</p> <hr/> <p>What did you learn about literacy learning and literacy instruction?</p>
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Scripting Notes and Student Response
for Announced Observation

Directions to students: Please write your reflection and return to Dr. Bouas by _____.
Be sure to sign the top sheet.

Time /Description	Sequence of Events/interactions	student Reflection

Date: _____ **Student Signature:** _____

Date: _____ **Instructor Signature:** _____

Student's Name _____

Program _____

Northwest Missouri State University
College of Education & Human Services
Practicum Performance Based Checklist
Reading/Language Arts

Completed by _____

Key: 9, 10 strong competency 3, 4, 5 weak competency
 6, 7, 8 working toward competency 1, 2 little or no competency

FACILITATOR OF COMMUNICATION

Clarity:

1. Communicates objectives clearly (directly or implied)
2. Communicates nature and sequence of learning task
3. Uses appropriate grammar usage
4. Enumerates and projects
5. Demonstrates accurate and current knowledge of content
 - * understands approaches to reading instruction: whole language, basal, literature based, skills
 - * understands how to teach phonics and other reading and writing strategies in holistic approaches
6. Provides feedback that informs

FACILITATOR OF COMMUNICATION

Enthusiasm:

1. Communicates expectations through motivational techniques
2. Demonstrates positive attitude toward lesson
 - * Voice variation
 - * Eye movement
 - * Hand gestures
 - * Body movement
 - * Facial expression
 - * Energy level
 - * Movement around room

INTEGRATOR OF CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

Organization

1. Shows evidence of adequate planning
2. Has materials ready for instruction
3. Demonstrates time management skills
4. Prepares and implements lessons which are sequentially appropriate to past and future learning
5. Is resourceful in finding, developing, and using appropriate materials, technology to aid instruction (software, videos, tapes, overheads, maps, charts, etc.)

FACILITATOR OF COLLABORATION/PARTNERSHIPS

INTEGRATOR OF TEACHING STRATEGIES AND TECHNOLOGY

Variety

1. Uses a variety of effective teaching techniques and organizational formats
 - a. Direct instruction
 - b. Cooperative learning
 - c. Individual practices, response, research
 - d. Direct/concrete experiences - Experiments, projects
 - e. Vicarious learning experiences (creative drama, role playing, role-taking and simulation)
 - f. Discovery learning
 - g. Large group/small group instruction
2. Uses Multisensory approaches, i.e., visual auditory, tactile, kinesthetic

"Wrap-up" – Final Evaluation Conference Discussion Items

Have this filled out and ready to share during your final evaluation conference. (Use back if need more writing space.)

1. What is one of the greatest instructional strengths I have gained since my videotaping?

2. What have you learned about the relationship between assessment and instruction?

3. What are the components of a balanced approach to reading instruction?

3. What have I learned about teaching and myself as a teacher during the practicum?
Consider:
 Planning
 Implementation (organization (flow of lesson) appropriateness of content/activities)
 Interactions with students (voice, tone, pitch, speed, use of crutch words, body movements, mannerisms, gesturing, posture, eye contact, enthusiasm, professional attributes)

Likert Scale Rating of Self-Assessment Processes Mean Score

Mean Score

1. Watching the videotape enabled me to identify strengths and weakness in my teaching.	4.58
2. The questions asked of me by the practicum supervisor during the video conference were helpful in leading me to reflect on aspects of myself as a teacher that I may not otherwise have considered at this stage in my development	4.57
3. Writing reflections in relation to the scripting notes lead me to analyze teaching episodes more carefully than I would have if I had not been expected to engage in written self-reflection.	4.08
4. Completing the reflective thinking protocols enabled me to identify factors and conditions that are critical if I, as a teacher, am to realize positive outcomes in my teaching.	4.33
5. Completing a final self-evaluation using the same practicum performance based checklist used by my supervisor and my cooperating teacher caused me to have a better understanding of my stage of development than I would have if only the cooperating teacher and the supervisor had shared their evaluations with me.	4.61

Procedures for Analyzing Qualitative Data

1. Assign an identification number to each data source (every interview transcript).
2. Read four of the interview transcripts and segment each of them. A segment, according to Tesch (1990) is a portion of... "text that is comprehensible by itself and contains only one idea, episode or piece of information" (p. 116).
3. Reread a second time and identify topics for each of the data segments.
4. Make a list of all topics identified in each of the four transcripts on one page. Have four columns. Compare all topics and draw lines between to connect similar topics.
5. On a separate paper, cluster similar topics (those connected by lines). Choose the best-fitting name from the cluster of topics from among the existing labels or invent new ones that capture the essence of the meaning better.
6. Make a new list that contains three columns:
 - a. Major topics that were constructed from clusters.
 - b. Unique topics that seem important to research purpose in spite of their rarity.
 - c. Leftovers
7. Make a copy of transcripts just used and use the list of topics in the first and second columns in #6 above as a preliminary organizing system. List these topics next to appropriate segments.
8. Work with two new transcripts and try out the preliminary organizing system. Segment the transcripts and then use the topics to label the segments.
9. Refine the organizing system.
 - a. List topics (that by now have begun to turn into categories) that occurred in all six transcripts in one list.
 - b. Make a list of the topics/categories unique to the research but did not necessarily occur in all the transcripts. (Important but rare.)
 - c. Look at topics. Categories for relationships and consider whether or not some are sub-categories of others. Construct a type of semantic map relating general topics. Categories to sub-topics/sub-categories. This will be used as a preliminary outline for the final report of findings.
10. Make abbreviations for each category and sub-category name. Add abbreviations to list made in #9 a and b above. Alphabetize the lists (categories and sub-categories). Segments may fit in more than one category.
11. Code each segment of data using the abbreviated category and sub-category labels. If a segment fits in more than one category, label the segment with all appropriate category labels.
12. Assign the data source identification number to each segment so that all segments can be traced to original sources.
13. Assemble data belonging to each of the categories in file folders using Tesch's (1990) adoption of Bogdan and Bilken's (1982) cut and put in file folder approach.
 - a. Make two copies of all categorized data. One will serve as the master copy and the second will be cut apart to be placed in category folders.
 - b. For those segments that fit into different categories, additional copies will be made.
14. Summarize the data in each folder and select illustrative quotes that might be used in the final report.
15. Analyze content of the folders in light of the research questions. Look for:
 1. Commonalties in content
 2. Uniqueness in content
 3. Confusions and contradictions in content
 4. Missing information with regard to the research questions
16. Triangulate the qualitative data with the quantitative data to answer research questions.

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