



Reflection as situated practice: A memory-work study of lived experience in teacher education

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to understand whether student teachers enact reflection differently as they encounter different situations within their teacher education programme. Group memory-work was used to generate and analyse five participants' memories of learning to teach. Three different discursive contexts were identified in the students' stories and each demonstrates that students reflexively enact reflection in relation to the discursive nature of the context. The analysis also reveals that critical reflection is possible, but that further attention must be paid to considering how it can be sustained in contexts outside of teacher education.

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Over the past 15–20 years the concept of reflection has become a popular and core aspect of the discursive practice of teacher education (Clarke & Chambers, 1999; Loughran, 2006; Tinning, 1995). Reflection is promoted in a myriad of ways to help student teachers unpack their own experiences, beliefs, knowledge and philosophies and to help them understand how these shape their identities and actions as teachers. Often implicit in such promotion is a construction of reflective practice that views the individual as a neutral, self-conscious agent capable of rational analysis. In this sense, reflection is seen as a tool that can be learnt and applied across a range of contexts. However, increasing attention is being paid to the socially situated nature of human activity and the mediating role that context plays in human consciousness, learning and identity (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Rovegno, 2006; Scott, 2001). If reflection is mediated by the context in which an individual is situated, the question then arises as to whether the nature of this reflection is influenced by the different situations student teachers encounter in their journey to becoming a teacher. In this paper we discuss this possibility through an analysis of the experiences of students in an undergraduate program of physical education teacher education (PETE).

Numerous studies have confirmed that students can demonstrate reflection when required (for example, Byra, 1996; El-Dib, 2007; Hatton & Smith, 1995a; Pedro, 2006; Pultorak, 1996). Our

own experience as teacher educators has demonstrated that student teachers can and do engage in reflection especially when required to do so for assessment tasks. However we know little of whether such reflective activity informs students' pedagogical thinking or transfers to other situations. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to understand whether student teachers enact reflection differently as they encounter different situations within their teacher education programme. As opposed to 'performing' reflection, the concept of 'enacting' reflection acknowledges that social contexts are constitutive of the kinds of knowledge, practices and subjectivities that enable reflective activity (Macdonald & Tinning, 2003). By exploring reflection as a situated practice it is possible to acknowledge the social and non-rational aspects that have a mediating effect on reflection.

1. Framing reflection as a situated practice

With its emphasis on the relation between subjectivity and social context, the concept of *situatedness* offers a compelling framework for the study of reflection. In particular, this perspective is drawn from the fields of cognitive science, anthropology, and sociology (Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Wenger, 1998). In essence, a situated perspective posits the belief that an activity like reflection is always situated in a social context, is social in nature, and makes use of the conceptual tools present in the context (Borko & Putnam, 1998; Putnam & Borko, 2000). In fact, as Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest, there is no activity that is not socially situated. In this

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sense, framing reflection as a situated practice enables attention to focus on the relationship between participation and context.

Social context has been conceptualized in a range of ways. While not all synonymous concepts, some of the names used include *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998), *cultural communities* (Clarke, 1996), *actor networks* (Callon & Latour, 1992), *discourses* (Foucault, 1972, 1977), *activity systems* (Engstrom, 1990), and *affinity groups* (Gee, 2005). In one way or another, each recognises the epistemic nature of collective social culture and the way it gives meaning and structure to those positioned within the collective. For the purposes of this study, we use the concept of 'discourse community' (Ovens, 2002; Rodriguez Romero, 1998) as a way of foregrounding the contextualized nature of reflective practice and the role people play in (re)creating this context.

As a concept, discourse community links the power discourses have to create specific perspectives for interpreting the world with the affiliations people make with particular groups or communities that circulate such discourses. The concept not only focuses attention on the relationships between people and the way agency is enabled or constrained, but also on the way the collective practices of the group provide the cognitive tools, such as ideas, theories and concepts, that individuals appropriate to guide and give meaning to their actions (Putnam & Borko, 2000). In this sense, a department in a secondary school, such as a physical education department, can be viewed as a discourse community because of the way it represents a collectivity of people all of whom have an affinity with the value of physical education and contribute to the shared practices that constitute physical education teaching. Although similar, university faculty teaching the PETE programme can be thought of as a separate discourse community and this gives rise to different practices and beliefs with respect to teaching (Howley & Spatig, 1999; Ovens, 2003). Each of these communities can be identified as a negotiated 'régime' of competence that is produced and sustained by its membership (Wenger, 1998).

Within most teacher education programmes students learn about teaching in a variety of different sites, from the lecture theatre through to school-based practica. Students participate in different courses that consist of a variety of formal pedagogical encounters with different academic staff. Each different situation is intended to govern or regulate the production of teacher knowledge, dispositions and skill in specific ways. For example, students move between general courses on educational psychology and sociology to more specific courses on teaching methodology and curriculum. In addition, students move between the university and schools during their practicum placements. However, far from being a coherent and homogenous field, teacher education becomes a context where there are competing and contested notions that student teachers must navigate (Segall, 2002). Within this field, a concept like reflection becomes promoted and practised in a variety of ways as different discourse communities take up different positions in the teacher education context.

In this sense, while reflection may appear to have some common language and ideas, the way each community frames the concept and produces reflection as a practice that students enact will be dependent on the discourses shaping the nature of the community. That is, as students move through their teacher education programme they may encounter quite different forms of reflection, underpinned as they may be by different political, phenomenological or pedagogical commitments (Ovens, 2002). For example, the concept of critical reflection exists as a practice in those communities that value the discourses of social justice, emancipation and empowerment, but becomes diluted and perhaps impossible when conflated with the broader project of producing teachers to fit into the changing context of school workplaces (Macdonald & Tinning, 2003).

From this perspective we believe it is important to keep in mind the duality of the community and the individual. While the community represents a collective set of practices and has cultural norms regarding how to act, it is the individuals who reflexively monitor and discipline themselves within these discursive ways of being that produce and sustain particular practices (Giddens, 1991; Rossi & Cassidy, 1999). It is the individual who construes situations with contextual features and meaning (Clarke & Helme, 1993). How student teachers construe the meaning of a situation may be different from how it was intended by teaching staff. In other words, the pedagogical work done might be different from the pedagogical intention (see Tinning, 2008). In this sense, student teachers often become very adept at reading the social context and knowing how to perform accordingly (for example, see notions of studentship, Swan, 1995, and resistance, Hickey, 2001). This has implications for the promotion and performance of reflection, as student teachers will reflexively monitor and mediate their actions as they construe the nature of the social context in which they are situated.

With respect to the study that is reported in this paper, the aim was to explore whether student teachers enact reflection differently in different settings. As teacher educators who actively promote reflection, our students are well versed in undertaking a variety of tasks designed to get them to reflect on their teaching. Our aim was not to find out whether particular tasks make them reflective, since their assessment performances in assignment tasks demonstrate clearly that they can perform when required. Rather, our aim is to look through our students' eyes in order to approach an understanding of how reflective activity emerges, varies and is experienced by students as they participate in the various sites of pedagogy that constitute their teacher education course.

2. Memory-work as method

In order to understand the students' experience, the empirical material used in this study was generated and analysed using the Collective Memory-work method initially developed by Haug (1987) and later modified by Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1990, 1992). Memory-work was selected because of its focus on interpreting participants' subjective experiences through an iterative process of individual and collective analysis of participants' written memories. In general, memory-work involves participants writing narratives about recalled experiences that are then analysed within the collective research group. The aim, through discussion and reflection, is to achieve an intersubjective understanding of the participants' experiences as the basis for (re)interpreting the research material (Markula & Friend, 2005).

Five student teachers in their final year of a PETE programme volunteered to be participants in the project. This provided a group small enough to allow for each participant to be involved in the collective discussion and a level of homogeneity that allowed for group compatibility (Kruegar, 2000; Small, 2000). One of the researchers then facilitated the group discussions and took responsibility for transcribing tapes and conducting further analysis. For the purposes of this paper, the participants' names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

Memory-work initially proceeds through a four-step cyclical process (Crawford et al., 1992). Step one involves each participant recalling a specific memory relevant to the research topic. This is typically done by using a particular phrase or word to help trigger each memory. The concern in this study was to find trigger terms that may stimulate memories of situations when the student was involved in reflective activity while not overly leading or confining what that reflective activity may be. As Onyx and Small (2001) state, "the trick is to produce the more jagged stuff of personal lived

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