Chapter 1
Learning from Reflective Pre-service Teachers: Introduction to the Book

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Abstract This chapter introduces the background to this book, with a focus on the use of reflective practice in teaching, and teacher educators' learning from reflective pieces written by pre-service teachers. This chapter then describes the structure of the book, which consists of six parts. Parts I to V include 33 pre-service teachers' own narrative stories as well as the five editors' reflections on these pre-service teachers' pieces. In the final chapter, the five editors reflect on the content and development of this volume.

Introduction

Reflective teachers are those who are aware of the reasons behind the decisions they make and the consequences of those decisions. There are many issues within classrooms and schools and the wider educational context that teachers need to continually reflect on and sometimes as a result of reflection change their thinking and practice or question practices and innovations … Learning the skills of critical reflection can help them make sense of the situations they face and helping them learn these skills during their course of study can set them on a path to become reflective teachers in their future careers . This is a

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long process, the benefits of which will help them become more effective teachers, develop positive relationships and deliver better learning outcomes for the students they will teach. (Smith et al. 2017, p. 25)

Following on from *The challenge of teaching* (Geng et al. 2017), this book uses reflective practice to connect the pre-service teachers' personal background with their placement experience around a self-selected topic. It also includes teacher educators' personal reflections on the pre-service teachers' reports on these issues of concern.

Dewey (1933, p. 7) described "reflection" or "reflective thinking" as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of grounds that support it and future conclusions to which it tends". Killen (2009) identified teaching reflection as a deliberate attempt to understand or evaluate the success or otherwise of teaching and learning experiences in order to shape future action or "reflection in action or on the run" (p. 103). Based upon this, teachers employ "self-study" or "self-evaluative reflection" on the level of reflecting on individual lessons they teach (Smith et al. 2017).

Reflective practice can provide important insights into the ways in which personal beliefs and life experiences act as a lens or filter for framing and understanding past experiences. In this book, we study how the reflective methods of pre-service teachers relate to their life experience and facilitate a deeper understanding of their own practices in different educational settings. Like our earlier book *The challenge of teaching* (Geng et al. 2017), this book provides a public forum for pre-service teachers' voices to be heard in order to bring to light the diverse, complex and challenging issues they are faced with during their practicum experiences.

The purpose of this book is to help produce reflective teachers, not academic researchers. Thus, even though the student chapters cannot represent their authors' thinking as experienced teachers, they do encourage them as well as other pre-service teachers to reflect on aspects of their practicum experiences and look into particular issues more deeply. Furthermore, we hope to instil a deeper appreciation of the diversity and complexity of pre-service teachers' classroom experiences. The ways in which pre-service teachers have, to various degrees, explored their values and beliefs and drawn on their past experiences also offer an important opportunity to examine the relationship between reflective practice and pedagogical concerns.

Bullough (2015, p. 158) commented that

… research should be conducted on the ways in which prospective teachers' backgrounds and identifications (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background, etc.) may connect to and inform the ways in which prospective teachers define teaching … teachers may be used as texts by and through which to challenge and push students' understanding and ideas.

This book has a strong focus on the ways in which pre-service teachers develop and articulate their professional knowledge by presenting pre-service teachers' reflections on contemporary issues that engaged them during their own teaching practicums. Palmer (2008, p. 15) stated in "The heart of a teacher",

knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly I cannot teach

> them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deepest levels
> of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries
> of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth.

Our book presents multiple levels of reflective practice as we editors, as authors, engage in reflective practice alongside our pre-service teachers. On one level, pre-service teachers share excerpts from their reflective journals, provide some personal background information and finally explain their professional response to the issues to enable the reader to glean a sense of a unique personal and professional identity. On another level, we editors reflect on our own pedagogical experiences which shape our reading of issues raised by pre-service teachers. We believe that we, as teacher educators and pre-service teachers alike, establish networks of personal, professional and cultural narratives that establish diverse ways of ordering and understanding our teaching practices and experiences. Consequently, our aim is to integrate the autobiographical characteristics of self-narrative from the perspective of pre-service teachers and teacher educators to further extend reflection on cultural and pedagogical assumptions that shape understandings of educational practices and experiences (Coia and Taylor 2017).

Reflective Practice in Teaching

Reflective practice is commonly used in teaching practicum programmes to bring to light routine interpretive activities that signify the beliefs and cultural assumptions of the knower. Australian society is not monolithic but made up of a richly diverse population of varying languages and cultures. Teaching is a dynamic process that must take into account not only the multicultural nature of the world in which we live, but also the powerful influence of new digital technologies that change the way we interact with the world and with each other. Vygotsky (1997) suggested that the role of the teacher is to facilitate student learning through carefully structured social interactions and scaffolded teaching and learning activities. However, as both students and teachers must navigate a rapidly changing and increasingly complex environment, it is also crucial that teachers do not make assumptions about their students' background knowledge and experiences.

Vygotsky (1998) described the dialectic of person and practice as a process of personal identity and practice. Pre-service teachers develop their own professional teacher identities over time as they draw on their own experiences as learners to navigate, understand and manage classroom situations. Consequently, teaching practices include engagement of pre-service teachers themselves in knowledge learning and this may require them to adjust their ways of thinking and behaving in the classroom. Stetsenkom and Arievitch (2004) explain that the learning journey of pre-service teachers is a period of self-transformation from a university student to a professional teacher. Edwards (2010) and Roth (2006) explain how histories, values and purposes

lead to transformation. It is dissonance that leads one to question these histories, hence the importance of critical incidents and reflective practice.

In this chapter, we focus on the self-transformation through reflective practice. By reflective practice, pre-service teachers' identities can be changed, especially when they are entering new classrooms and experience incidents that cause them to question their assumptions about teaching priorities and approaches. In 1999, Beach argued that "transitions are consequential when they are consciously reflected on, often struggled with, and the eventual outcomes changes one's sense of self and social positioning" (p. 114). In each of the following chapters, the authors have identified moments of uncertainty, of struggle, and a search for a resolution.

In our previous book, *The challenge of teaching* (Geng et al. 2017), the importance of developing reflective skills has been discussed in detail with rich stories from pre-service teachers themselves. Through reading the content of reflective practice stories by pre-service teachers, the teacher educators also look into the contemporary issues experienced by pre-service teachers while they are undertaking their teaching practicum. Reflective practice is not only for pre-service teachers but is part of a professional mindset. Through self-reflection, established teachers and teacher educators can also assure the quality of their teaching and identify gaps in their understanding.

Reflective Practice in Research

In the chapter, "The Importance of 'SELF'", in our previous book, Fry (2017) emphasised the abilities of "knowing the self" or "self-study" as a starting point for the private world of the individual to enable teachers to interact with the external world with further goals to develop their strong interpersonal behaviours and build effective working partnerships with their peers, students and families. Fry used geocentricism and ethnocentrism to assist his way of understanding of the world and his own behaviours during social exchanges.

With the understanding of "the importance of self" in mind, we can see there is at best a hairline distinction between reflective practice in teaching and its use in research, especially to the extent that the former is not reflection in the abstract, but based on observation and on discussion with students, teachers and/or parents. Action research is basically just a more systematic approach to virtually the same thing, typically involving cycles of questioning, gathering data, reflecting on the results and deciding on courses of action with the aim of improving one's practice (e.g. Ferrance 2000, p. 2).

Given that aim, it is understandable why action research must at least partially research the researchers themselves. At the same time, some researchers undertake research on themselves for more general purposes and using more general research frameworks. As one example, even in the early days of undertaking diary studies on language learning, researchers found ways of studying their own learning diaries in

ways that could be defended as legitimate research practice (e.g. Bailey and Ochsner 1983).

As another example, ethnographic research has long taken as a basic principle that the influence of the researcher on all stages, from the research design to the final analysis, cannot be avoided, but instead must be made explicit (e.g. Draper 2015, p. 38). It has furthermore been concerned with developing an "emic" perspective, that is how the insider sees, experiences, understands and expresses their "reality" (p. 38), and in fact ethnographic researchers are often members of the "culture" they are researching (p. 39). From here, it is a short step to researchers also researching themselves, through approaches that have become known as auto-ethnography that "have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings" (Denshire 2013; Holt 2003, p. 2). These might thus be considered more sophisticated bases for reflective practice.

About This Book

The heart of this book consists of 33 stories narrated by pre-service teachers, each presenting a glimpse of the writer's life experience and their potential as a class-room practitioner. Each of these stories discusses an aspect of pre-service teachers' classroom perspectives about educational practice. Following this introduction, the issues they write about have been categorised into five sections or "parts", each with an introduction by one of the editors, as described below. In each section, we suggest that you read through the editor's introductory chapter first and then continue on to the chapters written by pre-service teachers.

Part I includes seven student chapters (by Linda Hamilton, Terri Miller, Agniezka Medrecki, Jeremy Hunt, Brooke Trudgen, Alison Bosnakis and Mikaila Mangohig) that focus on preparing students for learning. The topics range from behaviour management to classroom layout, reading fluency, using visuals among special needs students, authentic assessment design and visual literacy, and homework design. This part is introduced by a chapter written by the editor Pamela Smith, with further discussion based upon her deep reflection in her teaching profession and teaching and learning experience in teacher training programmes.

Part II is introduced by the editor Paul Black and contains five student chapters (by Brodie Curtis, Caitlin Taylor, Kirsten Ifould, Zerina Haziabdic and Leah McNeilly). This section explores issues of how to engage students in their learning. These issues cover how to motivate students to learn, using personal music devices and music education, developing mindful learners, how to overcome high school students' negative attitudes towards language learning, and how to promote positive teacher–student relationships in secondary schools.

Part III focuses on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning, foregrounding the importance of incorporating ICT into classroom practice. This section has six student chapters (by Petros Gerakios, Anna Bascomb, Laura Checkley, Dominic May, Matthew Froese and Emily Ford), all of

which deal with how to implement new ICTs in teaching and learning. The editor Gretchen Geng begins this section by providing a reflective piece on her own experience of using and teaching ICTs in teacher training courses.

Part IV contains seven student chapters (by Jeremy Appleton, Hannah Young, Fiona Curtis, Nadia Lelli, Rachel Platte, Claire Gitzel and Meaghan Jones) dealing with the topic of well-being and the learning environment. The content of these chapters covers the issues of how to promote student well-being by developing empathy, the impact of mobile devices on young adults' sleep patterns, the importance of the physical classroom environment, the effect of arts pedagogies on primary boys' emotional intelligence, the implementation of yoga and the national school chaplaincy programme. This section includes a chapter written by the editor Leigh Disney, focused on an incident of self-study within his teaching experience, allowing him to understand the importance of well-being within early childhood settings.

Part V has eight student chapters (by Demi Cubillo, Rebecca Wood, Elizabeth McGuire, Blake Watherston, Casey Ellis, Jack Burton, Jing Weng and Kathryn Hamilton), all dealing with education and societal issues, generally covering gaming, NAPLAN negativity, examinations, culturally relevant content, gender and engagement in physical education, and sunscreen in early childhood settings. The editor Yoshi Budd begins this section by exploring the complex relationship between education and society.

These student stories are narrations, tending to be informal and colloquial, and the editors have tried to avoid excessive interference with the voices of their authors. At the same time, in a final part (VI) and chapter, the editors present their own collective reflections relating to these contributions and related matters.

Conclusion

This book presents 33 genuine and extraordinarily honest stories written by experienced and successful pre-service teachers. These strikingly interesting and authentic pieces of work present a range of different themes reflecting contemporary issues in teaching practicum in educational settings today.

We will use this book to promote reflection on the ways in which one's own values, beliefs and life experiences can influence one's professional practice. In many respects, this book also provides a mentoring framework for other pre-service teachers through the sharing of a broad range of issues encountered by pre-service teachers, providing multiple examples of the complexity of classroom practice, and demonstrating the importance of reflective practice. As such, the book is a medium through which fourth-year pre-service teachers and new graduates have shared their valuable experiences and insights into educational dilemmas.

To end this chapter, we would like to share a quote from one of our graduates who contributed to our earlier volume (Geng et al. 2017).

Even though my teaching career is only a short time, I am very happy because during the period I have learned a lot of teaching skills by attending some training in Australia. I am also grateful that I can have a chance to study in the university that made me become who I am today by providing a range of teaching strategies and skills that are very useful for me to use in my teaching practice in Timor (personal communication from Carmen Gomes do Rosário).

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