Prospective teachers views on collective reflection

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Abstract:

Background*: The reflection process is considered an extremely critical phase for the self-improvement of prospective teachers. During the practicum, students design, implement and evaluate their observations on children during the school program. The later phase of feedback to the university gives them the opportunity to reflect on a group level. The process of critical reflection is important because they detect the errors and redesign the observation process.*

Materials and Methods*: The sample consists of 210 students in the 2nd year at the Department of Preschool Education, University of Thessaly in Greece, during the academic year 2018 - 2019. The methodology that was used was a qualitative discourse analysis of student evaluation guides.*

Results*: The findings highlight the importance of critical thinking and group reflection. Also, students faced many difficulties that have analyzed during their feedback and reflection. The results approve that the training programs need improvement.*

Conclusion:*The competence of educators is not limited to the percentage of knowledge they have but to the decision-making process before, during and after teaching. In these phases, the critical thinking approach is extremely important, because the result of the teaching practice is determined and leads the pedagogue to his evolution.*

Key Word*: reflection, collective reflection, prospective teachers views, practicum, teacher education*

I.   Introduction

Theconquest of thinking ability and critical questioning of the educational work in teacher education is extremely important (Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Giroux, 1992).

Reflective practice (Schon, 1987) involves a continuous learning process based on careful observation and experimentation. Although it has been interpreted primarily as a form of self - reflection that leads to an understanding of one's own teaching, teaching teachers through critical reflection can also include examining the social, economic, and political contexts of higher education practice (Skelton, 2005; Kemmis, 1987).

Pre-service teachers who are novices with limited teaching and childcare experience may not be capable of critical or deep reflection without adequate support. Teacher's reflective capacity is an important means for teachers' growth in professionalism.Reflective process give the opportunity to the educator to reflect, evaluate, revise and adapt the learning process and teaching practices. At the same time, she/he understands that this course is thorough and primarily concerns his own development and empowerment along with the change on the educational context and the reform of pedagogical theory.Based on the above, this research studies whether students of 2nd year in their practicum developed a collective reflection.In reflective pedagogy, students through self - activation, self - modification and self - organization reflect on the subsequent learning activities that take place (Michalopoulou, 2018). In the reflective approach, knowledge is acquired through research and is created through negotiation. Students are encouraged to see reality both objectively and subjectively, depending on the tasks (Kritikos & Dimitrakopoulou, 2010). In other words, they interact with the reflective reality that is also part of them.

According to Jay & Johnson (2002) reflection has become an integral part of teacher education, yet its elusive boundaries make it difficult to define and teach. Examining the various facets of reflection with respect to teaching clarifies the concept, making it more accessible to pre-service teachers learning to reflect on their practice. In their article (2002) explore those facets and provides a typology designed to guide teacher educators in teaching reflection to pre-service teachers.

Reflection includes descriptive dimension, on the report of events and emotions, the comparative dimension, concerning alternative design and implementation and critical dimension, concerning the alternatives with respect to academic theories and their connection educational policies (Michalopoulou, 2018).

Ohlsson (2013) find that the collective reflection in teams differ with regard to collaboration and team atmosphere, and willingness to learn collectively. The analysts of talk at team meetings show the importance of

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collective reflection loops through which teachers transform the contents of their conversations. A facilitating team atmosphere seems vitally important for the emergence of identified collective reflection loops. Collective reflections potentially increase team learning.

From the research of Foong, Binti & Nolan (2018) the results show that collective reflection supported higher levels of reflective thinking during practicum at the integration, validation and appropriation levels of reflection, compared to when they reflected individually. Collective reflection provided Malaysian teachers with a new platform for problem-solving, connecting theory to practice, as well as the sharing and consideration of multiple perspectives, resulting in a deeper understanding of classroom practices.

From the researchers Hong, Lin, Chai, Hung & Zhang (2019) find out that the quality of feed-backed lesson design ideas was significantly improved, indicating a sign of pre-service teachers' enhanced fluency design. In addition, participants' design knowledge was also improved as evidenced in their deepening their reflection from basic, to more integrated.

II. Material And Methods

Study Design: this study was implemented during the practicum of candidate teachers
Sample size: the sample consist of 210 candidate teachers of the 2nd academic year
Study Location: at the Department of Preschool Education, University of Thessaly in Greece
Study Duration: during the academic year 2018 - 2019.

The students during the practicum a) familiar with environmental and kindergarten program, b) carried out systematic observations, recording and interpretation of characteristics and children's behavior and educational procedure.

During the first three meetings between the students and the Professor, the following issues were approached: the determination of the dimensions of systematic observation, the use of multiple techniques during systematic observation and their recording, subsequent evaluation, feedback and reprinting. In addition, emphasis was placed on highlighting the importance of systematic observation and the different recording techniques they can apply during the child observation process.

The involvement of these students with reflection and self - assessment processes was not systematic during their studies. It is possible that in some courses they were asked to be involved in reflection processes, but this was for a certain number of students and in specific teaching contexts. In order to create "common experiences" for all students, specific reflection actions were developed during the meetings:
a) given to students a list of questions for reflection, which could be used during the observations,
b) participated in feedback meetings in which they were asked to analyze and evaluate their notes and to suggest changes and reforms.

Subjects & selection method: The data collection was carried out by the works handed over by the students after the end of each observation of their practicum in kindergartens. For this study, 315 assignments were selected according to two criteria: a) students whose assignments will be used for the purpose of the research, to have common experiences in the theoretical framework and in the instructions for the elaboration of the assignments, having attended the teacher in all meetings and b) the grade given by the teacher ranges between eight and ten.

Procedure methodology

The "shared experiences" were considered important for the analysis of data as well as facilitate comparison, for example, among those who heard the students and those reviewed, and reduce the factors that can affect the quality of the evaluation and the general 'written' of a student. The selection of works scored between eight ten done in order to avoid a series of problems, often present the work of teacher candidates, such as brief answers.

The students answers to the observation guides were defined as data for analysis, where they present the data of the observation from the visits to the kindergartens. The guides were complemented by twins and essentially the teams had to work together to decide what to include in the guides. Out of a total of 210 students, 315 observation guides were studied.

The observation guides studied and recorded the collective reflection processes described by the students. Then, the categorization of responses were detected in 12 different categories. The analysis of the observation guides focused on the search for common "issues" or "concerns" that preoccupied students during the evaluation and reflection of the action. Initially, each guide was studied separately, with the aim of capturing the "image" of each group as a separate "case". Then, the guides were tested with a total goal of identifying common categories (Fairclough, 1995; Mayring, 2000; Stemler, 2001).

III. Result

The answers of the candidate teachers to the question whether the cooperation in the group was helpful to observe the child and if it was catalytic to complete the guide, the following 7 categories emerged: individual recording, exchange of views, distribution of responsibilities, cooperation, teamwork, communication, evaluation.

Individual recording

From the answers of the candidate teachers, it seems that they moved on two levels. On the one hand they were a team and at the end of each observation they handed over a guide, on the other hand they kept individual notes and then they discussed what they would record on the guide. In this way, different views were expressed and elaborated. In addition, the details that each observed separately contributed to the deepening of the observation and the group implementation of the project.

Each of them recorded many notes, which contributed to the enrichment of the answers and their maximum approach (X22).

We make a separate record of the answers during our observations in the classroom and then with keywords and discussion we compose our answers (X56).

What one did not observe, was immediately supplemented by the other. Finally, we both combined our views which were different and thus, we saw a behavior from different perspectives (X65).

Exchange of views

Candidate teachers consider the exchange of views valuable and beneficial. The event that had not noticed the one member of the team, it observed it from the another member of the team, contributing to the exchange of views and change.

There were times when I had doubts about certain behaviors of the child that I could not solve if I did not talk to the colleague (X77).

We studied the guides before completing them and after discussions we composed our answers (X33).

Through common thinking and discussion one person complemented the other. Seeing and perceiving things each from their own point of view (X86).

We had to discuss an event that we observed in order to better understand it (X 112).

Distribution of responsibilities

Cooperation in the group was substantial, because there was good agreement between the members, there was division of powers during observation, unity of views and agreement on the options and methods used. In general, it was a process of discovering, as a team, the particularities of each child and especially of the child they chose to observe more systematically.

The fact that the group consisted of two people was quite helpful, as it provided the opportunity to share the workload and the obligations that existed and arose.

As one member may be engaged with the children, the other observing the course of the activity, often exchanging responsibilities (X71).

Cooperation

Collaboration in the group is considered necessary and efficient because many times something one member did not notice, the other member helped to record details for a more comprehensive picture of the observation of the child's behaviors. The discussion and the exchange of material between them helped them to complete and enrich the observation guides. As for the guide, it helped them because they had organized areas and this facilitated the observation. In this way they complemented each other and when there were different views they observed again to see where the error was in the previous views, so that they were able to have a multifaceted and comprehensive opinion.

There was absolute cooperation and understanding in the team and this had a harmonious effect. It helped us a lot to observe a child, to see his behaviors and reactions on various issues (X102).

In a class of 22 infants it is quite difficult for a single person to be able to observe everything that is happening. Due to our cooperation we were able not only to observe, but also to complete better the guide (X44).

Teamwork

The students actively participated in shaping the structure of the work in a receptive atmosphere. They were able to observe and carefully record the infant's behavior on a social and personal level. They came in contact with on-site observation and ways of systematic observation that will be of particular use to them in their future work with a creative contact with children. The collaboration was extremely important at both

observation and writing levels and was particularly effective, as two different people perceive situations differently, resulting in complementarity and mutual assistance and drawing more comprehensive conclusions.

Teamwork during the observation process was helpful in completing the guide and making decisions through discussions, in which there were differing views on the child's behavior and how he interacted with the kindergarten teacher and classmates. The work was shaped by the interaction with the child and by his observation from his entrance to the kindergarten until the end of the visit.

From our very first visit we worked as a team and complemented each other (X91).

We talked as a team about all the topics we have written in the study guides and that was nice because in each study guide we both knew more and felt happy for the collaborative work we did (X159).

Regarding on teamwork, I think we operated as a whole, there was mutual aid and support. Everyone had their strengths and weaknesses, which within the team used all the skills of each member for the best possible result (X210).

Communication

In addition, the communication between them provided an opportunity to say what they saw from another point of view and to perceive things that might have escaped the personal view. Despite the fact that they were observing the same situations at the same time, the personal perception of each may allow it, in specific cases, to "translate" the observed in a different way from that of the other member of the group. Finally, the existence of good communication and agreement on those which have to be recorded in an appropriate way, was something that played a very important role, as it allowed to fulfill their obligations without problems.

There was good communication because through it we formed the observation guides in the best possible way (X6).

Due to our different experiences, we interpreted some of the children's reactions/behaviors differently and after a discussion we came to our final answer. We have learned to think more comprehensively, taking into account both propositions (X149).

The communication in the group was satisfactory to observe the child, because we were able to cooperate harmoniously and with appetite, without disagreements and controversies. Also, there was respect for the views of one and the other, mutual understanding and help to fill the observation guide (X181).

The communication of the members and the cooperation for the completion of the guide were equally helpful since we both discussed what we had noticed at that time, or after the observationwe decided what and how to imprint them on paper (X245).

Evaluation

From this process seems to have been able to work together better, to first listen to others and to accept the good and the bad review, because through this interface, they wish to evolve. The role as observer, gave them the opportunity and time to process issues related to children, but also the way of teachers teaching. Concerns have been raised about the way children are evaluated.

I learned to focus on one subject but discovering many ways to do so. I definitely consider myself better equipped for my next experience as a kindergarten teacher (X1).

To the question whether the feedback process helped them reconsider their views and reflect on how to complete the guides, their answers were categorized into 5 categories: guide enrichment, experience of the other, connection with the theory, improvement of written language and self-assessment.

Guide enrichment

According to those who observed in kindergarten compared to those who discussed in class, they revised their views and completed the guide more easily. As a result, they may reflect on their views and change their way of thinking. It was understood that they should think, observe and keep notes of what they observed, short, well organized and with the appropriate content, so that the systematic observation has a substantial meaning. In this way they better understood the difficulties of educational reality and discerned which elements are important to observe as professionals.

Each feedback was an important factor in completing the guides. It also helped a lot in reviewing and enriching the views so that the role of the kindergarten teacher is clearer.

Above all, the feedback process provided a reflective look at how they should complement the guide they had each time in their hands. The discussion, around each question, with the students and listening to their own experiences and observations enabled them to get acquainted with ways of operating the kindergarten, different from those they observed themselves, while also offering material that was useful in enriching it.

Arguably the observation feedback process is very useful because when you listen to events that happened in other kindergartens, where did your fellow students, automatically you can remember something

that happened in your own school, which you had forgotten or not you thought it was so important to skip it. So, in this way you can enrich the guide with additional events that took place, however you had not noticed them before or you considered them unnecessary and did not complete them (X88).

Some events that may not have sufficiently noticed at the time of the feedback came back to our minds and thereby enrich the guide, changing setting aside the additional setting aside something (X101).

The experience of the other

The feedback process helped them reconsider their views and reflect on how to complete the guides as they had the opportunity to exchange views with other fellow students, listen to their experiences and see through their own eyes what their own experience was like from their contact with children.

By exchanging views among all the students, some after the guidance of the professor were able to have more flexibility in completing the guides, reviewing certain views.

Furthermore, in listening and other experiences came in the process to make comparison with their experience and reach the final conclusion.

The revised views helped them to think better about the answers, to see them from a different perspective and thus capture them as best as possible and with more data. Although there was a strong resemblance between the views, the experiences of other colleagues also provided an opportunity to get to know better the kindergarten space, the way that other kindergarteners operate and other children's behaviors.

Feedback helped us a lot because there we heard incidents from other colleagues which made us think, to reflect on our own case whether there was something that escaped our attention and we had to complete it (X7).

Feedback was important for the process of completing the guides, but also for reflecting our views, as through the experiences that the students shared with each other, new ideas and different teaching practices were given (X61).

In this way we better understand everything we have observed and thus we are given the opportunity to compare them with any different observations and self-assessments of our fellow students (X195).

Connection with theory

From their answers, it seems that it helped them a lot to understand and assimilate the theory. They extracted more information that helped them understand systematic observation in the theoretical context. They thought in more detail about how to write and express everything they have noticed. It is essential that the vocabulary that have used and which gradually through the three observations and feedback began to be adopted. As new researchers - observers, any additional source of information is valuable for their evolution in the process of systematic observation.

The process of all feedbacks has been helpful, confirming the answers that we have given. We heard useful information that is sure to look us useful generally in terms of our practice (X76).

It was quite helpful because every time we went through the process of rethinking and remembering things that we didn't consider so important, but also what we had in mind in theory it was better to understand. We also enriched our knowledge and often revised pre-existing ones (X208).

Improved written language

The process of feedbacks helped them enough to revise their views, as well as taking more able to correct and to consider what more they could have thought and fill the guide.

The students were able to think clearly and more specifically about how to complete the guides, so that each time the way of thinking does not work superficially, but specifically and consciously. From all the discussions in the course, they improved on observing and focusing on important points of observation and being able to capture them in writing. It helped them figure out how to interpret children's behaviors and their reactions to the stimuli of adults and their peers.

The feedback process gave them the answers to some questions, made them to review some points of view and confirm some others, helped them to organize better the observation data and enriched them, give more targeted answers and better formulate the already existing notes that they had recorded during the observation.

With the feedback we took data and saw the errors and in the next guide we completed it better trying to improve it. We reflected on what we had written and focused on our answers (X42).

We have tried to improve the way we formulate our answers, to be more detailed or not so much (X61).

We make proper recording of guides. Mostly the Professor helped us, so what we have seen and we were impressed at the kindergarten to express it in a more correct and effective manner (X107).

The remarks and comments of Professor allowed us to understand what, exactly, the information we had collected was related to questions of the guide and gave us an idea of how they ought to record (X133).

Self-assessment

The feedback with the team and with the Professor, enabled them to reflect on the practices that were applied to critically approach of the educational work during the learning process in the classroom. They went through the process of evaluating themselves. They have also been able to identify effective techniques, which include not only negative criticism of educational action, but also positive one, in order to maintain these strategies and facilitate the learning process.

I reviewed myself, I recognized my strengths and weaknesses, I worked with my team to achieve a common goal, but also gained critical thinking (X4).

During the observation of the educational process, I was able to identify both good and bad practices of my colleagues. This gave me the opportunity to practice critical thinking on their work and either avoid bad practices, whether to adopt the good ones and use them (X209).

IV. Conclusion

The feedback process was crucial, because it analyzed the substance of questions so as to respond precisely and more clearly, avoiding misunderstandings. Then, it was equally important that they listen to different experiences and aspects of each group so that they have a more complete picture and can compare situations and behaviors.

The feedback process was essential, as it has broadened the scope of the oversight guides approach. Upon completion of each feedback, they returned to the observation guide to refill those that had not given weight and were not necessarily considered to be recorded, as well as those that approached differently after feedback and reflection.

In this way, they developed collaboration skills for the implementation of systematic observation as well as in the collective feedback with the team and the Professor.

More specific, the collective reflection helped them to understand the types of descriptions that was described analytical and gave the context as well as the interpretation of some situations and behaviors. However, they understand to avoid the chaotic descriptions with over-analysis of the insignificant and to emphasize in more details that were not considered important. They gave explanations to their questions about the different behaviors, through the different perspectives they heard and discerned what was right and what was wrong, trying to avoid them or adopting good practices and strategies, reviewing some mistakes and enriching the knowledge.

They considered it beneficial that they were judged to be evaluated and evaluated the others, not only by the Professor but also by the team members. In this way, there is greater feedback and active participation in the process by all members, possible errors and effective practices are identified in order to improve each member individually, but also to improve the team collectively. Therefore, there was a more comprehensive picture for improving teaching, as more people are involved, a mistake they did not make in the course of systematic observation can be discovered by another member or vice versa.

The Professor's advices and modifications helped them to organize better the observation guides and to improve both as a team and individually. As observers of the educational process, they considered that seminars were very important, due to the constant feedback to the group, examining their mistakes.

The results of the research agree with those of Foong, Binti & Nolan (2018) which show that collective reflection supported higher levels of reflective thinking during practicum at integration, validation and appropriation levels of reflection, compared to when they reflected individually. Collective reflection provided prospective teachers with a consideration of multiple perspectives, resulting in a deeper understanding of classroom practices. Also, the results of this research are in accordance with the results of Michalopoulou's research (2018). Regarding the purposes of reflective practice, the results indicate a greater emphasis in initial teacher education. There is also clear evidence that reflective practice does make a difference at both the personal and professional level. In its conclusion the paper stresses the importance of reflective practice in bringing about change and improvement in initial teacher education.

In conclusion, candidate teachers are introduced to collective processes and through collective reflection they can identify errors and improve their educational practices.

The development of the ability to connect the scientific knowledge that educators gradually acquire in practice is of paramount importance for their professional development.

This link concerns theoretical issues with current conditions in the formal or informal education environment. According to Michalopoulou (2018), the pedagogue selects the criteria and evaluates the choices based on the quality of the pedagogical result. The options should assist children to hypothesize, investigate, invent and create, to encourage decision making, problem solving, collaboration, initiative, communication and interaction.

These skills are being developed evolutionarily and, according to research, are an issue that focuses on critical assessment of pedagogical practices and how educators themselves learn (Haevard & Hodkinson, 1994).

The competence of educators is not limited to the percentage of knowledge they have but to the decision-making process before, during and after teaching. In these phases, the critical thinking approach is extremely important, because the result of the teaching practice is determined and leads the pedagogue to his evolution.

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