

# **Knowing and Experiencing the Practice of Teaching**

## **Journey towards Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher**

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### **Abstract**

*Pivotal to teacher development is the practice of reflection and therefore, its importance in a Teacher Education programme cannot be undermined. Unless teachers foster the practice of critical reflection, they remain engulfed in parochial values, unexamined assumptions and biases, and prejudices emanating due to unquestioned judgments and interpretations. The present article explores the student Teacher's experiences while pursuing Bachelors of Education (B.Ed.) programme, to understand the ways in which reflective practices nurture their professional identity as teachers. Data were collected from observations, personal diaries, reflective journals and narrative accounts of student teachers. An analytic framework of Dewey and Schön were used to interpret the narratives of the student teachers. It was found that the professional knowledge of teachers was intricately linked to what teachers thought and experienced before and while teaching. Also, evidence from the narrative accounts illustrated the student-teacher's capabilities to learn, and the ways in which they were able to construct meaning by interrelating the practice of teaching to their own life experiences. They were thus able to extend reflective learning beyond themselves to wider group of individuals. The article therefore highlights the relevance of reflections as an integral part of preservice Teacher Education, enabling critical self-awareness and informed educational practices.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The relevance of reflections in Teacher Education programmes has been widely acknowledged in recent researches. This is because in a diverse country like India, the phenomenon of schooling is not devoid of complexities and challenges. Diversity related to cultures, caste, class, religion and ethnicity in our society makes the experience of going to schools, and participation in the teaching-learning process different for students from different backgrounds. For instance, students from the economically weaker section have experiences that are different from students who belong to affluent sections (Lott 2001, Mallica 2005). Similarly, girls and boys experience participation in school-related activities differently (Bhattacharjee 1999). Therefore, today's teachers need to be more aware, sensitive, flexible and open to change. Keeping this in mind, the teacher cannot view schools and the teaching-learning process in isolation from the larger social and political milieu. Moreover, the school personnel simplistically assume that students' performance is based on merit and individual capabilities. This meritocratic myth leaves issues related to inequality and injustice unexamined within the school context. Teachers pay more attention to curriculum transaction and greater focus is given to achieving desired learning outcomes. In the given scenario, an understanding of and engagement with actual

classroom processes, those that involve the relationship of students with teachers, authority figures and peers, is ignored. Moreover, learners are socially situated and knowledge is socially constructed; therefore, school processes have to be viewed in their entirety. Pre-service Teacher Education programmes therefore need to pay urgent attention towards enabling future teachers' abilities to reflect upon the socio-economic, political and cultural realities of the everyday life.

*National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2010* envisions a Teacher Education programme that prepares today's teacher to be more dynamic and flexible to the changing contexts. It proposes the development of reflective practice among teachers therefore, to be the central aim of Teacher Education. The *NCFTE, 2010* (p. 54) highlights that, 'Teacher Education programmes at all stages should provide opportunities to the teachers for understanding their self and others, develop sensibilities, the ability for self-analysis and the capacity to reflect...Professional opportunities need to include reflection on their own experiences and assumptions as part of the course and classroom enquiry; critical observation and reflective analysis of the practice of teaching'. It further necessitates a need for feedback and continuous dialogue between student teachers and Teacher Educators for the enhancement of the capacities to

reflect. However, Teacher Education programmes all over the country are insufficiently prepared for this, and the major focus of teachers still remains on time-bound transaction of the curriculum through structured lesson plans, classroom management strategies that impose strict discipline and adherence to rules, gearing the learner towards examinations conducted at the term's end. Due to the routine of such activities in schools, Teacher Educational institutions are compelled to develop capacities that will enable student teachers to fulfill these assigned duties once they enter schools.

No time and attention is devoted towards enabling the student teachers to reflect on the existing school practices and their relevance in the light of researches that emphasise on child-centred pedagogy for enhancing the quality of teaching-learning. School knowledge and community knowledge or out-of-school experiences are not allowed to penetrate through the school walls, compartmentalising knowledge into legitimate and official. Children's ways of learning in their communities are held irrelevant and inconsequential to the teaching-learning process within schools. Nor are attempts made to shift the process of learning from rote memorisation to develop students' abilities to search for meaning out of personal experiences, enabling them to construct knowledge through self-reflection during the process of learning.

Sole emphasis on teacher-directed activities therefore can be detrimental to the implementation of progressive ideas in education. Teacher Education programmes therefore must endeavour to provide ample space and opportunities, wherein Teacher Educators engage with student teachers to develop criticality towards textbooks, curriculum, syllabi and teaching practices, rather than taking them as a 'given'. Also, by constantly drawing a link between psychosocial theories of students' development potential, teachers will be able to step into the shoes of their learners and understand their motivations and intentions of behaving in a certain way. Dialogues between student teachers and Teacher Educators should facilitate the development of critical consciousness, whereby learning to become a teacher will involve critically thinking about one's own experiences in families, schools and colleges and linking the same to understand others within their professional context. This will enable student teachers to become socially sensitive and conscious about finer human sensibilities.

### **FROM KNOWING TO EXPERIENCING THE PRACTICE OF TEACHING**

In this paper, I draw from the works of John Dewey and Donald Schön to develop an understanding of the reflective practices in Teacher Education programmes and the centrality of reflections for the

development of the professional identity of a teacher.

John Dewey's text *How We Think* (1933) is frequently cited for understanding reflective practice in Teacher Education. According to Dewey, 'reflective thinking' involves 'turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration' (Dewey 1933, p. 3). This type of thinking is systematic, as it focusses on the problem or situation at hand and aims at understanding it in its entirety. Reflective thinking, according to Dewey, should be carried out sequentially following the methods of the sciences and attentively, wherein justification for belief should be based on sound proof and backed by evidence. Reflective inquiry, according to Dewey, begins 'in a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty' (Dewey 1933, p. 12). This thinking involves analysing and exploring situations and arriving at possible solutions. 'Data, (facts) and ideas suggestions and possible solutions, thus form the two indispensable and correlative factors of all reflective activity' (Dewey 1933, p. 104). For Dewey, after gathering appropriate data related to a problem, the reflective practitioners chart out ways of acting, keeping in mind the logical conclusions that can be attained from the given data. Hébert criticizes Dewey's formulation for being an 'ends-based model initiated by a problem that must be solved... It privileges rational knowledge over practical knowledge' (Hébert 2015, p.

363). Dewey points, 'the demand for solution of a perplexity is the steady and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection... The nature of the problem fixes the end of thought, and the end controls the process of thinking' (Dewey 1933, p. 14–15). Dewey has given primacy to the removal of doubt that practitioners encounter in their professional endeavours. This, according to him, will enable reflective thinkers to move as close to certainty as they can, and thereby enable them to solve the problem at hand through well thought out plans. Technical rationalists maintain that all knowledge can be attained through rigorous application of scientific method and systematic and methodic study, and all propositions can be verified for its truth value through either observing them empirically or analysing them rationally or through a combination of both. Dewey's model therefore underlines segregation between thought and action. Therefore, the knowledge attained through practice is viewed instrumentally, and is held as a means to reach the well thought out and previously desired end. Dewey's emphasis on the need for reflections emerging due to 'a shock or an interpretation needing to be accounted for, identified or placed' (Dewey 1933, p. 12) has been criticised for not taking into account situations that are uncertain and do not induce doubts (Hébert 2015, p. 364). Situations that are a part of the routine and those that adhere

to societal norms and values are excluded from Dewey's model for conceptualising reflection. Reflective thought therefore means to operate within given set of norms and the foundations of these norms will never be questioned, unless they emerge as interruption, shocks or dilemmas.

This rationalist-technicist orientation of John Dewey is criticised for being limited in its understanding of and explanation for reflective practice in Teacher Education. Donald Schön in his work *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987) propounded the Experiential-Intuitive model, criticising Dewey for his overreliance on rationalism. Schön introduced types of reflection as 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action'. Schön describes 'reflection on action' as the act of thinking critically about one's initial understanding of a phenomena and arriving at a new understanding, dismissing the previously held beliefs, and verifying this new understanding by applying it to real life situations. It is only when the participant is no longer undertaking an action and moves away from it to mentally reconstruct a situation whereby his/her actions or situations can be analysed, 'reflection on action' takes place. 'Reflection in action' refers to the process of thinking that an individual undertakes while doing a certain task. According to Schön, knowledge in action does not emanate from rational thinking or 'prior intellectual operations' (Schön

1983, p 51); knowledge rather is gained intuitively while working on a certain situation through experience. Knowledge attained in this way, according to Schön, cannot be spelt out or observed empirically. Only the individual who acts knows and simply has 'feel for' how to act (Schön 1983, p 19). Schön points that such knowledge cannot be explained by clear and precise means, given that it is 'tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing' (Schön 1983, p. 49). Therefore, Schön's conceptualisation of 'reflection in action' provides epistemological supremacy to experience and intuitive knowledge that proficient practitioners develop (Hébert 2015). Schön points out that 'reflection in action' is based on phenomenon that is unknown, 'when intuitive performance leads to surprises, pleasing and promising or unwanted' (Schön 1983, p. 56). For instance, a teacher after delivering her lesson may step back from the situation to reflect on how to improvise her teaching methods for greater class participation; she is then said to be engaging in reflection on action. On the other hand, a teacher may feel that not too many students in her class are participating and therefore she spontaneously makes changes in her lesson plan to enable students to engage in classroom processes; then she is said to be engaging in 'reflection in action'. Although 'reflection on action' and 'reflection in action' is

a crucial analytic categorisation, it is difficult to segregate the two in practice. However, Schön gives primacy to knowledge based on experience and guided by practical action, reinstating thought and action to be interrelated.

Dewey's contribution towards understanding reflective thinking in Teacher Education cannot be undermined. He is credited to have introduced systematic ways of thinking about classrooms, schools and teaching, therefore questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions about them. Therefore, the technical-rationalist model makes it imperative for the teacher to draw out logically designed plans for organising classrooms and teaching. It mandates the use of resources, materials and space within schools in the most efficient ways to achieve the desired ends. Also, planned thinking should be justifiable by assessing students suitably, to verify if the desired ends have been achieved. Reflective thought for Dewey is a product of the intellect, wherein a person solves a problem through what he/she already knows thereafter being able to justify one's own thought if solutions are arrived at in a given situation. However, not all ways of knowing about teaching can be based on the intellect. Therefore, Schön points that thought cannot be divorced from action. For him, reflective inquirers may not have to step back from a situation to analyse it, but they are capable

of spontaneously knowing while working on a situation at hand. Schön privileges the experiential realm of individual subject, wherein thinking redesigns what an individual is doing while he/she is doing it. Reflection in action therefore enables an individual to produce knowledge while engaging in situations and tasks. This renders teachers as agents who not merely respond to a given situation but intuitively arrive at knowledge while engaging in the teaching-learning process, which modifies and guides their action and also enables them to construct knowledge. Van Manen illustrated the importance of reflections within the context of schools. Teaching, according to Manen, is a form of a 'tact' or 'capacity for mindful action', wherein the pedagogue becomes, 'immediately active in a situation: emotionally, responsively and mindfully, engaged, sensitively, reflectively with a child' (Manen 1991, p. 122). According to Hébert reflections for Manen are closely related to the pedagogy defined as, 'the practice of living with and responding to children' (Hébert 2015, p. 367). According to Manen, teachers intuitively know what to do in a given situation and act quickly and confidently. Therefore, rather than engaging in reflective thought, knowledge is embodied and tact becomes their 'second nature' (Hébert 2015, p. 368). This enables teachers to act immediately and reflectively in a given situation.

## CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The school experience programme (SEP) organised approximately for a duration of 16 weeks is a crucial component of the B.Ed. programme. This takes place during the second year of the B.Ed. programme, providing student teachers the opportunity to be a part of the actual school system and enrich themselves through interactions within and outside classes. During the first year of the B.Ed. programme, students engage theoretically with key ideas and concepts in education. A combination of Foundation and Pedagogy courses helps the student teachers in building perspectives related to researches and progressive ideas within education. The first year of the B.Ed. Programme also includes practicum courses such as Field Observations and Tutorials which enable the student teachers to visit schools or organisations functioning in different educational settings and understand the diverse learning experiences of children. The tutorial provides a space to students wherein they can closely interact with their mentors and carry out reflections that enrich their observations related to the field. This enables the student teachers to build linkages between theory and practice, and reflect on the existing gaps by identifying the reasons for practice and working on ways that can solve problems or make the current practices more meaningful. The second year of the B.Ed. programme provides the

student teachers the opportunity to directly engage with students in schools through the School Experience Programme (SEP). All the students, during the SEP, regularly go to schools for teaching in classes allotted to them. They are guided by mentors from the university who help them to plan their lessons and enable the facilitation of actual teaching-learning within the classroom. Apart from this, the School Experience Programme provides opportunities to student teachers, wherein they can immerse themselves in the field through invigilating during examinations, participating in parent-teacher meetings and conduct of morning assembly, sports and cultural events and other co-curricular activities. Mentors regularly provide feedback and scaffold student teachers, enabling them to improve their practice of teaching. Therefore, SEP not only provides student teachers a platform where they get to teach, but also gives them an experience wherein they understand about the school culture and ethos. This helps the student teachers in bridging the gap between theory and practice and this is a crucial step towards the formation of their professional identity.

While reflections during the first year of the B.Ed. programme resemble Schön's conceptualisation of 'reflection on action'; it is during the second year that, the student teachers get an opportunity to undertake 'reflection in action'. In

order to understand the nature of reflections undertaken by the student teachers during SEP, the researcher in the current study was both an insider-participant and a researcher. The researcher participated in the study as a mentor where she guided students on the different aspects of the School Experience Programme, such as classroom teaching, school activities and research projects. The participants in the current study were five student teachers undertaking practice teaching in Kendra Vidyalaya located in the west zone of Delhi. The age range of participants in the study was 21–24 years. Four of them were graduates and one of them was a postgraduate. The study spanned for a period of approximately five months, wherein the researcher provided mentorship to the student teachers from the starting day of SEP till its end. Being an insider provided an opportunity to the researcher to observe the student teachers inside and outside their classrooms. This enabled the researcher to interact and observe student teachers in the staffroom, playground and activity rooms. Many times, informal conversations with student teachers in such spaces enabled the researcher to analyse the ways in which they thought about their teaching and other school processes. Informal conversations in different school settings therefore helped the researcher to bridge the gap between the researcher and the researched, and enabled the student teachers to

freely interact with the researcher without the fear of being observed. The data for the current study was drawn from such conversations, observations, and students' reflective journal files that had detailed accounts of their professional experiences within the school. The researcher also maintained a diary where observations carried out within the school setting were recorded and this was later used for analysing the findings of the study. In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality to the participants, pseudonyms have been employed throughout the study. The data was analysed using qualitative methods, wherein the student teachers' reflective journals were carefully studied to find out about the nature of reflections carried out by them. The researcher, as a mentor, provided guidance at regular intervals through critical questions, scaffolds and narrations of her own professional experiences to enable the student teachers to think, and areas where they needed to reflect further were identified and worked upon. Such interactions were crucial for the study as they provided an opportunity for the researcher to step into the shoes of the student teachers and derive insights related to what they thought and felt, and analyse the reasons behind their actions. Analysis was thus an ongoing process, wherein both the mentor-researcher and the student teachers participated within the naturalised settings of the school to understand

the ways in which reflective thinking takes place or is carried out.

### **BECOMING A REFLECTIVE TEACHER**

The process of becoming a reflective practitioner cannot be imposed. It is a process of discovery through personal awareness and critical analysis. Therefore, the School Experience Programme is a crucial juncture, wherein student teachers, for the first time, get to be in schools as insiders taking part in activities, classroom teaching, interactions with students and staff. This provides them an opportunity to think about school practices deeply, spread over a considerable duration of time.

During the initial phase of the School Experience Programme, the student teachers reflected on the diverse aspects of the school, especially those which they thought were in non-alignment with their previous ways of thinking and imagination about teaching-learning. Student teachers reflected on the ways in which whatever they read in theory was in contrast to actual practice within schools. One of the participants reflected about the non-secular messages that the school building communicated, and how he thought this opposed the way he imagined schools should be. Ravi wrote—'All around the school and in classrooms, you find Hindu gods and goddesses. As soon as you enter school, you see this. I think this was because majority of the people in school were Hindus. Schools should

instead, respect all religions'. On probing further as to why he thought this, Ravi stated that he had read about how schools should foster democracy and secularism whereas he was witnessing a paradoxical situation as he realised that his theoretical assumptions were in direct contrast to the actual practice. In another incident, Sheetal another participant expressed worry over inadequate resources within the school for teaching-learning. She wrote—'I was told by my pedagogy teacher to use a spring balance while teaching the topic on buoyant forces, but here in school, lab equipments are not to be touched. Only the senior students go to labs. There are labs for juniors also, but no one can go there. I asked if I could carry some of the equipments for demonstrating an experiment in my class, but the lab attendant refused. I think the students' learning suffers a lot due to non cooperation on the part of the school staff. If I have to carry out demonstrations, then I can only do it when I have my personal equipments. Otherwise, there is no option but to rely on the textbook and teach in the traditional way.' Therefore, the student teachers' reflective journals provided evidence related to the ways in which they were thinking about teaching-learning. It is evident that instead of simply observing a given phenomena within the schools, the participants were engaged in a process of understanding it by inquiring and reflecting upon the reasons behind

actions and situations, and analysing or thinking about why a situation exists or carries out in schools. This was evident in yet another participant Ashok's reflective journal. He wrote—'Today the P.T. teacher started hitting three students from class ninth with a wooden bat. They had misbehaved in his class. This shocked me, as no one is allowed to punish students corporally as per the Right to Education Act. The students were saying sorry again and again but the teacher did not care to listen. Later, the principal came and asked him to stop and issued a green slip to the students which meant that they were suspended for a few days. I think teachers feel that they need to control students by creating fear in their minds. Instead it is important to inquire the reasons for misbehaviour and counsel them after doing so'. The reflective journal of the students therefore gives an account of the ways in which the student teachers were getting to understand school-related processes by 'reflecting on action'. Similar to Dewey (1933, 1938), the capacity to reflect is initiated after recognition of a dilemma or uncertainty. This dissonance created due to mismatch between prior expectations related to how situations ought to be and how they were in reality, became a focal point of inquiry, wherein the student teachers reflected in order to critique the current situations, draw conclusions and generate new hypothesis. According to Dewey,

reflective thinking involves continual evaluation of beliefs, assumptions and hypotheses against the existing data. As the student teachers were engaged in the process of solving their dilemmas encountered within the school, reflective thought for them had become a means to do so. The student teachers therefore systematically and logically worked upon probable solutions to the problems that they encountered. These well-thought out solutions would then act as a guiding force towards their actions and not the other way round. Rational thought was found to be the premise on which the student teachers based their actions, and systematic and logical thinking became pivotal to the formation of their professional identity during the initial weeks of the School Experience Programme. These instances of reflection carried out by the student teachers suggest that reflective thinking primarily means 'cognitive problem solving' (Larrivee 2000, p. 295).

It is difficult to separate 'reflection on action' from 'reflection in action' as both these analytic categories given by Schön worked simultaneously while the student teachers engaged with the process of meaning-making in their professions. However, during the initial weeks of SEP, there was predominance of 'reflection on action' as the student teachers had to step back from a paradoxical situation in order to work out alternative ways in which problems could be solved. Initially, the student teachers

reflected on situations after dilemmas were encountered, but gradually, they started reflecting during their practice, and while participating in the teaching-learning process. 'Reflection in action' was observed during the last few weeks of SEP as students no longer needed to step out of a situation to think about it but could think simultaneously while acting and participating. Reflections, thus became an ongoing process wherein the student teachers thought before, during and after participating within the teaching-learning process.

### **CRITICAL REFLECTION AND SELF-INQUIRY**

The process of becoming a reflective teacher is a continual and an ongoing discovery. However, developing as a reflective teacher not only encompasses critical inquiry but also self-reflection. Reflective teachers therefore develop the ability to step into the shoes of students and understand the consequences of their decisions and classroom practices for them. They are able to think, therefore, not as teachers but as students and understand how their routine judgments will impact the learners. Self-reflection therefore goes beyond critical inquiry 'by adding to conscious consideration, the dimension of deep examination of personal values and beliefs, embodied in the assumptions teachers make and the expectations they have for students' (Larrivee 2000, p. 294). Therefore, reflective thinking cannot be merely equated

with 'cognitive problem solving' but significance should also be attached to the role of self.

The capacity for self-reflection and critical inquiry does not occur at once. Even in the present study, the student teachers were initially used to an inquiry about the school processes as outsiders. The ability to immerse themselves into the learning situation by stepping into the shoes of the learners for understanding their world views only took place at a later phase of the School Experience Programme. Also, such transformation did not happen on its own. It was mediated by constant interaction and discussions with the supervisor and peers. Student teachers were given regular feedback on their reflective journals. The researcher found that based on this, many student teachers modified their reflective journals. They were gradually able to look at a given situation in depth and incorporated multiple viewpoints to analyse their professional endeavours. The most significant transformation, however, was the ability of the student teachers to modify their existing practices by overcoming self-imposed limitations and preconceived notions. The student teachers who were earlier used to carrying out 'reflection on action', were gradually seen reflecting while acting. However, not all student teachers experienced this transformation, as only some felt that becoming critical of their own selves was crucial for their professional

development and identity as teachers. Ashok therefore said—‘Sometimes, you have a good and well thought out plan, but you suddenly realise that students are confused. You just feel something is wrong. Although you thought you would be supportive, but you realise that it is not working and you must rethink about what to do next’. This resembles Schön’s conceptualisation of ‘reflection in action’, wherein the student-teacher undertakes the process of thinking while performing a task. The term ‘feel’ and ‘realise’ resonate with the student-teacher’s capacity to intuitively know experientially while performing an action, rather than prior thinking or planning about it. For the practitioner, in this case, participation within the teaching-learning situation gave rise to surprises and uncertainties which were unknown to the student teacher prior to performing the act. Becoming an effective teacher therefore does not simply mean a combination of strategies ensuring that students do the tasks assigned and classes are managed adequately, but it requires the teachers to remain fluid and to develop capacities, wherein as teachers they can move in any direction depending upon the situation. Therefore, ‘effective teaching is much more than a compilation of skills and strategies. It is a deliberate philosophical and ethical code of conduct’ (Larrivee 2000, p. 294). This was evident in a participant—Payal’s reflective

journal. She says, ‘While teaching the concept of density, I gave the students some questions. While they were working on the sums to calculate density. I suddenly felt that although I was teaching, but the students were not learning. Everything was fine, but I felt the class was not the way it usually is. I quickly demonstrated how a heavy object sinks in water and a light object floats on it. The students became curious and started asking questions. As the class became interactive, I felt more satisfied’. Critical reflection therefore enabled the student-teacher to move beyond her existing mental habits, and she was able to adopt new ways of perceiving and interpreting experiences. Advocates of reflective practice emphasise on experience as the starting point, however they also stress on critical analysis for the reformulation of that experience (Brookfield 1995, Larrivee 2000). This was evident in Payal’s journal wherein she is modifying her skills to invent new strategies while teaching and she developed ‘a sense of self efficacy’ to create personal solutions to problems (Larrivee 2000, p. 294). Reflections, therefore are a crucial aspect of a Teacher Education programme. The study also revealed that reflective practices not only enabled the student teachers to think rationally about the most appropriate decisions that they should take in order to teach effectively in a given situation but also reflection and affection were

found to be closely related. During a conversation that the researcher had with Taruna — a participant in the School Experience Programme, she revealed—

*Taruna: I was constantly trying to figure out why Jyoti did not respond in my class. Initially I thought she had a fear related to mathematics but I was wrong.*

*Researcher: Why?*

*Taruna: I found out from her teachers in the previous grade. She was quite okay in mathematics. Actually, she had problems at home.*

*Researcher: What kind of problems?*

*Taruna: Her parents were going through a divorce and her father thought that she should get married right after school. They were looking for a suitable boy.*

*Researcher: How did you know?*

*Taruna: Jyoti told me, while I was discussing with her the courses that are taught in B.Ed. She told me that she too wanted to become a teacher, but she was not sure if she would be able to.*

*Researcher: What did you do?*

*Taruna: I counselled her and told her about all the challenges that I had faced as a girl. I told her not to give up. We talk about our personal lives and I help her with her studies also. We are almost like friends now.*

Similar to Schoffner (2009), reflection and affective domains were found to be closely linked, as student teachers are required to analyse complex classroom situations which often involve personal feelings. Student teachers therefore not only develop the capacities to visualise the lessons from students' perspectives and make modifications in their teaching to suit the situation, but also are able to empathize with their learners. Emotions and the affective domain, play an important role here. Reflective processes therefore not only help the student teachers to understand their students but they are able to understand themselves better while developing their identity as teachers.

## **DISCUSSION**

Today's classrooms have students from diverse backgrounds, and it is imperative for teachers to be thoughtful about diverse the teaching-learning situations. Becoming reflective is a worthwhile disposition for the student teachers to acquire. The present study focusses on how the reflective practice enables the student teachers to adapt and operate as professionals and teach effectively. The ability of looking back enabled the student teachers to reflect on their teaching and the ways in which they would improve.

In order to study the reflective practices of teachers, the analytic lens of Dewey, Schön and Manen have been used to interpret the ways

in which thinking and experience come together during everyday practices of teaching and learning. It was found that during the initial days of the School Experience Programme the student teachers focussed on thinking about how their classrooms could be managed better, how to manage resources in classes, how to improve teaching and their participation in day-to-day school events. Also, student teachers reflected on whether students could understand what they taught, work on different methods of teaching, and evaluate whether the objectives that they planned at the onset, were achieved. However, at the later stage of the School Experience Programme, the student teachers were able to step into the shoes of the learners and understand their world views. It is during this time that reflections enabled the student teachers to empathise with their students and it

is here that the student teachers were not simply thinking about teaching but were articulating affective concerns related to their learners.

Reflective practices are crucial for the development of professional identity of a teacher. Each teacher, however, must discover her own way in the process of becoming a reflective practitioner. Practitioners in their journey must adapt to an ongoing growth process through critical inquiry of classroom practices. The trajectory of reflective teachers often involves conjoining of personal beliefs and values with one's professional identity and this leads to critical action. However the path towards becoming a reflective practitioner cannot be predetermined. It has to be learnt through engaging in the process, and living through it. Thus, critical reflection is not just a way of approaching teaching practice but it is a way of life.

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