Abstract

The study attempts to examine the environment and the opportunities available for reflective practice in pre-service teacher education in the Indian context. Research studies indicate that, though the concept of reflective practice is an established theoretical construct in teacher education, the realization of the construct in actual practice is still not significantly evident, and process of reflection is still more rhetoric than skill and practice.

In this context, this study endeavoured to examine the opportunities for reflection in second language pre-service teacher education and how the opportunities are used for the development of reflective practice. Extending the discussion of reflective practice to the literature and discourse of narrative in the context of teacher development, the study also examined the possibilities of using narratives to maximize opportunities for the development of reflective practice.

The data for the study was collected from real teacher training environments, and the research sample included teacher trainees, teachers and teacher educators. Using a range of tools, from questionnaires which provided the baseline data, the study examined processes and activities in pre-service teacher education with the help of insights gained from classroom observations of theoretical and practice oriented teacher training sessions through a preliminary study which was followed up with interviews and focus group discussions in the main study.
The findings revealed that there was a rich environment provided for reflection and reflective practice at various stages of pre-service teacher education, through preparatory activities as well as assignments and tasks throughout the duration of the training programme.

However, the significance and importance of these activities were largely lost on teacher trainees as they merely looked at these as routine activities, and most often the practice and significance of reflection did not become a part of the cognitive discourse of teacher trainees.

It was noticed, in the preliminary data collection stage, that during preparatory, practicum and post practicum phases of pre-service teacher education, there were opportunities to develop personally meaningful learning. Teacher trainees had opportunities to engage in collaborative, problem solving and skill developing discussions with teacher educators, school teachers and peer.

Teachers and teacher educators who formed part of the study also expressed the need to use reflective practice to link knowledge to practice, through activities that provide meaningful engagement with beliefs and practices. In an attempt to explore ways in which opportunities for reflective practice can be maximized in pre-service teacher education, the study also explored ways and means in which narratives can be used for teacher development.

Findings revealed that teachers benefitted largely from narrative and storied experiences, especially when they were shared during discussions and awareness raising activities as well as collaborative discussions related to peer experience
and stories, and this indicated that a more meaningful narrative experience could be built into pre-service teacher education.

The significant issues highlighted by the study were:

1. Reflective practice should be integrated more meaningfully into pre-service teacher education to become a relevant aspect in professional development of teachers
2. This integration can be facilitated by providing an appropriate reflective environment through various activities
3. These activities should extend to teacher experiences and beliefs to provide the necessary integration of knowledge, practice and skill
4. Reflective practice should necessarily become part of the belief systems and cognitive processes of teachers and teacher trainees to lead to professional development.