

Reflection as a Critical Component in the Preparation of Teacher Candidates

By *Ismael Flores-Martí*



Teacher education programs use a variety of assessment strategies to help their prospective teachers acquire the teaching skills necessary to teach physical education. Some educators have criticized teacher education for perpetuating the view that learning to teach is merely a personal challenge to acquire skills such as giving clear directions and providing accurate feedback. The purpose of this article is to describe an assessment strategy regarding reflection skills used to help physical education teacher candidates improve their teaching.

It is argued that Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) courses which focus on technical aspects of teaching fail to prepare teachers who are reflective and able to appreciate the social and political complexities of teaching and schooling (Tinning, et al. 2001). Gore (1990) suggested that pre-service physical education teachers differed in terms of what and how often they reflected. Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (1994) concluded that prospective teachers place asymmetrical emphasis on the focus of reflection, since the focus of reflection was mostly dominated by technical issues of teaching. The authors argued, in their foundational and methods courses, that teacher candidates should be taught how to view and interpret teaching from a variety of perspectives.

Meanwhile, Sebren (1994) suggested that a key element in a successful reflection program is a clear definition of reflection and how it will guide the program. For example, before candidates engage in the process of reflection, it is important for them to understand the objective of reflection. The candidates must understand that reflection is their views on the

application of their knowledge. It is not a description of "what happened," but rather an analysis of the events that occurred in the classroom that will help them see what is needed to maintain or improve the outcome of their teaching.

It is critical for candidates to understand the different components of a lesson and the importance of being able to reflect on each one. This ability to break down and analyze the different aspects of a teaching session could be developed if the definition of the "reflection" is clear and accurate. Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (1994) defined the foci of reflection as technical (instructional or managerial aspects), situational (contextual issues of teaching), and sensitizing (reflection upon social, moral, ethical, or political aspects of teaching).

In this article, the description of reflection as an assessment strategy will only be applied on the instructional and managerial aspects of teaching (technical). During the first phases of the "learning to teach" process, candidates tend to focus on specific aspects of their teaching. For example, individualization of instruction is when the candidate provides feedback to individual students. It is a strategy sometimes overused by candidates during their first practicum experiences. This is an excellent strategy, but not the only one when a teacher provides general and/or specific feedback (instructional aspect). Reflecting on the provision of feedback during instruction can help a candidate see what is needed to diversify her/his way of providing feedback. Even though reflection can be applied to many different teaching areas, the scope of this article will be limited to these technical aspects.

National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

It is important to see the application of this assessment strategy within the standards of a teacher education accrediting agency. Several of the concepts within the rubric are suggested by the NCATE standards. NCATE revises its unit accreditation standards every five years to ensure that the standards reflect current research and state-of-the-art practice in the teaching profession. Specifically, the nature of this rubric is related to NCATE standard 1 which targets the candidate's knowledge, skills, and dispositions. This standard states that candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers or other professional school personnel know and demonstrate the content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn. The term "candidate" stands for individuals admitted to, or enrolled in, programs for the initial or advanced preparation of teachers, teachers continuing their professional development, or other professional school personnel. Candidates are distinguished from "students" in P-12 schools. Furthermore, each standard contains three components: a) the language of the standard itself; b) rubrics that delineate the elements of each standard and describe three proficiency levels at which each element is being addressed; and c) a descriptive explanation of the standard (NCATE, 2005).

Focus

In order to systematically study and analyze a teacher, it is necessary to monitor the teaching and collect information (data) on what happens (Tinning, et al. 2001). The authors argue that it is impossible to monitor everything. The focus for reflection should be based on the selection of a particular issue or feature of the teaching act. Student teachers need to be guided through their reflective experiences. In terms of particular teaching issues, provision of a specific guideline is necessary so candidates know how to shift their reflective focus as their experience progresses. This guideline should be shared with the students ahead of time and should delineate, for example, the different weekly focus.

Guideline Questions for a Reflection Paper

It is helpful for candidates to have guidelines when writing reflective notes. The following guideline questions are not comprehensive but are a good start to help candidates in their reflective process. It should be made clear that candidates do not have to answer each one of the questions, but to treat them as their guide in the process of identifying the strengths and/or weaknesses of their teaching.

1. How do you feel about the outcome of your lesson? Explain.
2. What was the part of the lesson you think was the most effective/most ineffective? Explain.
3. What would you do differently if you were asked to teach the same lesson?
4. How was your role as a "manager?" Explain.
5. What did the students learn from the lesson? Can you provide evidence of their learning?
6. If there were inappropriate behaviors during the lesson, what did you do to decrease them? Explain.
7. What type(s) of feedback did you use throughout the lesson? Do you think your use of feedback was effective? Explain.
8. Was the instruction clear to the students? Describe.

Assessment Rubric

Once guidelines have been provided to help the candidate see what possible areas in need of reflection are (managerially and/or instructionally), a set of specific criteria can be provided to help focus the reflection process. A rubric, as an assessment strategy can assist in this process. The following rubric (Table 1) intends to provide an idea of a specific set of criteria with the potential of helping the candidate narrow her/his reflective thoughts of a given lesson. The rubric can be used by the university supervisor, cooperating teacher and/or candidate. Moreover, it is critical to share with the candidate these set of criteria prior to the lesson in order to be consistent with the objective of reflection.

Indicators

An analytic-trait rubric divides a product or performance into distinct indicators or dimensions and judges each separately (McTighe & Wiggins, 2005). The authors stated that analytic rubrics, as evaluation tools, provide more specific information or feedback to students, parents, and teachers about the strengths and weaknesses of a performance. Teachers can use the information provided by an analytic evaluation to target instruction to particular areas of need.

In the analytic rubric provided in Table 1, several indicators are listed. These are: (a) instructional or managerial aspects; (b) teaching strategies; (c) evaluation of lesson; (d) articulation; and (e) presentation.

Instructional or Managerial Aspects

Depending of the focus of the reflection paper, candidates are expected to write about their instructional and

Table 1. Rubric for a Reflection Paper

Student's Name: _____ Week # _____ Reflection's Focus: _____				
Indicators	Target	Acceptable	Incomplete	Unacceptable
Instructional or managerial aspects	Candidate is exceptionally clear when describing the instructional or managerial aspects of the lesson	Candidate is generally clear when describing the instructional or managerial aspects of the lesson	Candidate lacks clarity when describing the instructional or managerial aspects of the lesson	Candidate is unclear when describing the instructional or managerial aspects of the lesson
Teaching strategies	Thorough explanations about the candidate's rationale for specific teaching strategies	Substantial explanations about the candidate's rationale for specific teaching strategies	Incomplete explanations about the candidate's rationale for specific teaching strategies	Serious misconceptions on the explanations about the candidate's rationale for specific teaching strategies
Evaluation of lesson	Thorough evaluation of lesson	Substantial evaluation of lesson	Partial evaluation of lesson	Unclear evaluation of lesson
Articulation	Candidate is exceptionally clear when writing her/his thoughts about the activities within the lesson	Candidate is generally clear when writing her/his thoughts about the activities within the lesson	Candidate lacks clarity when writing her/his thoughts about the activities within the lesson	Candidate is unclear when writing her/his thoughts about the activities within the lesson
Presentation	Candidate's paper presentation contains no typos	Candidate's paper presentation contains minor typos	Candidate's paper presentation contains numerous typos	Candidate's paper presentation contains significant errors throughout
Grand total: _____				

managerial strategies. Within documenting these thoughts, candidates can write about their provision of feedback, development of content, and clarity of cues, among other instructional strategies. In terms of management, candidates can write about their control of students' behaviors, management of equipment, and time among many other strategies. It is expected for students to be exceptionally clear when describing these strategies, but it is the teacher educator who is the one to assess the quality of the description of these indicators. For example, it is stated under the levels of incomplete and unacceptable that the candidate lacks clarity and is unclear respectively. Evidently, there is not much difference between these two descriptors, but it

is up to the evaluator to determine if the section within the reflection paper is incomplete and/or unacceptable. In this section, candidates are expected to be highly descriptive of the instructional or managerial aspects of their lesson.

Teaching Strategies

Candidates are expected to thoroughly explain the reason, logic, and/or rationale of their applied strategies and how they are based on the contextual situations of their specific lesson. Additionally, they are expected to write about their action/reactions based on specific and unique cases presented within the lesson. For example, the candidate will write about the reasons why a game needed to be modified fur-

ther based on the teacher's observations. This indicator has the potential of helping the candidate to further understand and refine his/her teaching style.

Evaluation of lesson

Candidates should be able to evaluate their lessons after identifying the different applied instructional and managerial strategies. They should elaborate on the evaluation of their lesson by providing a clear justification of their perceived teaching strengths and weaknesses.

Articulation and presentation

Descriptions and explanations of the reflection paper should be easy to follow. The student should be able to make appropriate connections between the different areas required within the rubric. Moreover, the paper should be presented in professional manner.

Any attempts to increase candidates' reflectivity should not be limited to one class for one semester. If reflection is considered important, it has to be done throughout a teacher education program and coordinated among classes to be effective (Placek & Smyth, 1995). Candidates need to practice the reflection process in different contexts and with different topics in order to refine their levels of reflections.

Conclusion

A reflective teacher can see beyond the specific events that took place in the classroom. Reflection helps teachers identify the strengths and weaknesses of a lesson and can provide the information needed to improve instructional and/or managerial issues. However, an assessment on reflection is only one option among many other assessment strategies used to improve teaching skills. It is through the improvement of instruction or management of specific situations that one can refine his/her teaching skills and provide a better environment for student learning.

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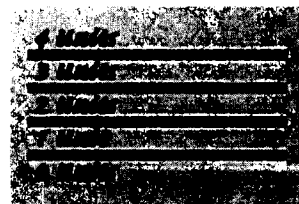
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