

Chapter 14

Developing Critical Thinking and Reflection in Teachers Within Teacher Preparation

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ABSTRACT

To better prepare teachers for the field, education preparation programs (EPP) need to increase their emphasis on using practice-based experiences that are embedded throughout the teacher preparation program. These experiences must give opportunities for TCs to practice reflective and critical thinking skills. These key skills must be explicitly taught and scaffolded throughout the practice-based experiences to better prepare self-reflective TCs and critical thinking practitioners. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to show how to incorporate critical thinking and reflective practice opportunities in (1) content courses using case-based instruction, video-based instruction, lesson study, and microteaching; (2) within practicum settings using observational feedback and video analysis; and (3) finally, incorporating performance assessments, such as the EdTPA and PPAT, to measure a TC's ability to provide instruction while thinking critically.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this chapter is to set the stage to demonstrate the importance of developing critical thinking and reflection skills in teacher candidates (TCs) within our educator preparation programs (EPPs). Research demonstrates that critical thinking and reflection are essential and don't necessarily develop in the TC without providing explicit models and opportunities to practice and receive feedback within both coursework and practicum/clinical experience.

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This chapter first demonstrates the need for more opportunities for TCs to develop critical thinking and reflection skills. Next, we demonstrate how to teach critical thinking skills through university coursework using the following practices: (a) case-based instruction; (b) video-case instruction; (c) lesson study; and (d) microteaching. Then we will shift and demonstrate how to develop these skills in practicum-based experiences using the following practices: (a) performance feedback; (b) video analysis; and (c) performance-based assessments. For each setting, coursework and practicum, we provide a summary of the research base with an emphasis on what it looks like in the preparation of teacher candidates.

Background

According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The current model for EPPs has not prepared teachers for the demands of the field. One reason for this is because EPPs focus most of their time on pedagogy and theory with limited opportunities to practice instruction of this content in a classroom setting (NCATE, 2010). Teachers learn how to teach using general instructional practices in university content courses and then apply these skills in a separate practicum setting that is often the culmination of the student's preparation program (Robinson, Nemr, Nicoll-Senft, Spear-Swerling, Tralli, & 2017). This creates a disconnect between theory and practice that many TCs will not be able to deploy the coursework content to their classroom setting (Scheeler, 2008). Because TCs are not able to apply their skills in classroom settings throughout their program, TCs often feel unprepared for the profession (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012) which results in increased teacher attrition, lower student achievement (Goldhaber & Haber, 2014; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009), and disrupts teaching teams or school programs because of frequent turnover (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).

Importance of Critical Thinking in Education

Griffiths (2000) discusses the importance of being self-reflective as an essential element of being an effective teacher because it emphasizes the importance of being a professional. A professional is always seeking to improve their skills and understanding and self-reflection is a teacher's *individual* professional development opportunity. The one consistent thing in education is there will always be change (e.g., new standards, curricular programs, student demographics/skills, etc.), and teachers need to reflectively evaluate how the change will impact practice. Akbari (2007) discusses how teachers that are more self-reflective may be less prone to fads/bandwagon efforts, which are notorious in education, because they more critically evaluate factors in the decision making process. Teachers need to be able to analyze how their instruction is impacting student learning and identify what may need to change (e.g., strategy, behavior management, content, etc.) to maximize student learning. An essential skill in being responsive to student learning is critical thinking and self-reflection (Griffiths, 2000).

Given these effects, EPPs should provide more opportunities for TCs to develop and deploy critical thinking and self-reflection skills across their teacher preparation experience. These experiences need to happen in both traditional classroom experiences as well as practicum in an intentional and scaffolded manner for best effect. In a study examining the relationship between EPPs and student achievement, Boyd, et al., (2009) conducted a value-added analysis looking at the features of 31 New York City EPPs for elementary school teachers and the effects on student outcomes within the first 2 years of teaching.

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