

Reviewing Special Education Preservice Teachers' Reflective Practices over Two Field Experiences: Topics and Changes in Reflection

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Abstract : During pre-service field experiences teacher candidates are often asked to reflect as part of their training and in this investigation candidates' reflective journal entries were reviewed, coded and analyzed with results suggesting teacher candidates need more direct instruction on how to describe, analyze, and make judgements on their instructional practices so that their practices improve over time. Teacher education programs often incorporate reflective-based activities during field experiences. The purpose of this investigation was to determine if special education teacher candidate's reflective practices changed as they completed their two supervised field experiences and to determine what topics the candidates focused on in their reflections. The six females graduate students were completing two field experiences in special education classrooms within one academic year as part of their coursework leading to a master's degree and special education teacher state certification. Each candidate wrote 15 reflection journal entries (approximately 200 words each) per field experience. Each of the journal entries were reviewed sentence by sentence to determine a reflective practice score and to determine the topics discussed. The reflective practice score was calculated using four dimensions of reflection (describe, analyze, judge, and apply) in order to create a continuous variable representing their reflective practice across four points of time. A One-way Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) suggested that special education teacher candidates did not change their reflective practices over time (i.e., at time-point one the practitioner's mean score was 56.0 out of 100 (SD = 7.6), 53.8 (SD = 4.3) at time-point two, 51.2 (SD = 4.5) at time-point three, and 57.7 (SD = 8.2) at time-point four). Qualitative findings suggest candidates focused mostly on themselves in their reflections. Conclusions suggest the need for teacher preparation programs to provide more direct instruction on how a teacher should reflect. Specific implications are provided for teacher training and future research.

Keywords : field experiences, reflective practices, special educators, teacher preparation

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