

## Case Analysis on Self Reflection of Prospective Special Educator for Professional Excellence

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### ABSTRACT

Self-reflection is a process of examining our thoughts, emotions, attitudes, skill and the way we act in a particular situation. It leverages our own career paths and identify our unique skills to excel in our profession. This study aims to find out the importance of self-reflection in shaping the teaching skills among prospective special educators. The study employs interview and focused group discussion to a sample of 15 prospective special educators. The interview schedule will be employed to the selected samples. The special educators demonstrated that self-reflection strategies helped them to identify their unique set of skill required to perform teaching skills. The study highlighted the importance of self-reflection to analyze, identify, and enhance their teaching skills to provide better learning experiences. The study implied the need for such self-reflection training programmes to the prospective special educators to equip them to teach students with special needs effectively.

**Keywords:** *Self-Reflection, Prospective Special Educator, Focused Group Discussion, Professional Excellence*

Teaching is one of the influential professions. Excelling in teaching is directly related to the life of many students and society. Effectively evolving as a better teacher to meet the challenges in the field is in the hands of the concern person themselves. Becoming better is the journey of excellence in their respective professions. Self-reflection is a process of purposeful contemplation and introspection, where individuals examine their thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences. Reflection in the mere layman term it is "...simply means thinking about something," but for some, "it is a well-defined and crafted practice that carries very specific meaning and associated action" (Loughran, 2002). A prospective Teacher will be beginner for the field of teaching as they are undergoing training to become an actual practicing teacher. This study focuses on the professional development of prospective special education teachers through self-reflection and self-reflective measures for enhancing themselves and their classroom environment.

### *Self-Reflection*

Self-reflection is a process of examining our thoughts, emotions, attitudes, skill and the way we act in a particular situation. Numerous definitions for Self-Reflection were available in

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literatures. Dewey (1991) defined reflection as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends”. (Gillespie 2007) defines Self-Reflection is a temporary phenomenological experience in which self becomes an object to oneself. In this study the term Self-Reflection is operationally defined as the ability of prospective special educators to reflect on their own teaching action and their teaching behaviour by themselves.

### *Self-Reflection in Teaching*

Being Self-Reflective keeps the teacher to be aware of their skills in order to apply them in the classroom for effective teaching. Reflective practice is a paradigm that dominates teacher education around the world; therefore, it is commonly included in many professional development programmes (Farrell 2008; Leather and Popovic *ibid*). Self-Reflection involves looking inward to gain a deeper understanding of oneself, one's values, beliefs, strengths, weaknesses, etc. It also allows them to identify their own feelings and attitude towards a particular student or class. Reflective practice is usually considered a form of cyclical and systematic inquiry where teachers carefully collect evidence about their teaching practice in order to analyze, interpret, and evaluate their experiences with the intention to improve their future teaching (Farrell, 2016; Mathew & Peechattu, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Question*

Can Excellence in Profession be achieved through Self-Reflection training for Prospective Special Education Teachers?

### *Objectives*

- To discuss about various aspects of Self-Reflection and its implication in teaching by Prospective Special Education Teachers.
- To analyze the individual opinion towards self-reflection practice.
- To summarize the prospective special education teacher's real time experience in Self-Reflection.
- To Identify the need for the Self-Reflection training.

### *Sample*

The sample for the current study were 15 Prospective Special Education Teacher from Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Science, Alagappa University.

### *Inclusion Criteria*

- Prospective Special Education Teacher completed one year of their under-graduation in their course (i.e. Bachelor in Special Education)
- Completion of Teaching Practice both in General Teaching as well as Specialization Teaching (i.e. Teaching Practice in Special School)

### *Exclusion Criteria*

- Prospective Teachers other than the field of Special Education (i.e. Bachelor in Education)
- Prospective Special Education Teacher who hasn't completed any of the teaching practice.

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### Procedure

This study is carried out using Focused Group Discussion (FGD) which can yield valuable and reliable data on scientific studies, FGDs can be applied to four different phases or stages of a scientific study such as Exploration, Monitoring, Evaluation, Gathering and Assessing outcomes (Barbour, 2014). In the current study FGD is used for the purpose of exploration on the concept of Self-Reflection and its application for effective teaching by Prospective Special Education teachers to achieve professional excellence. The scheduled focused group discussion was carried out for the selected 15 Prospective Special Educators according to the inclusion criteria. Consent for participating in the research were taken from each sample. Self-Reflection and Insight Scale developed by (A. M. Grant et.al 2002) was used to understand the sample through their level of self-reflection.

## ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

*Table 01: Data of Self-Reflection and Insight Scale*

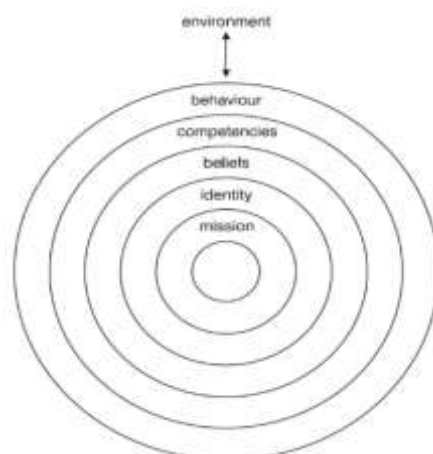
S.No	Subject	Engagement in Self- Reflection		Need for Self- Reflection		Insight		Total	
		Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%
<b>01</b>	<b>K.A</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>80.5</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>91.6</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>68.7</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>79.1</b>
02	G.D	20	55.5	19	52.7	29	60.4	68	56.6
<b>03</b>	<b>K.K.A</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>83.3</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>77.7</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>81.2</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>80.3</b>
<b>04</b>	<b>G.A</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>97.2</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>47.9</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>78.3</b>
<b>05</b>	<b>S.K</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>88.8</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>94.4</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>79.1</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>86.6</b>
06	K.H	20	55.5	28	77.7	28	58.3	76	63.3
07	M.G	26	72.2	20	55.5	24	50	70	58.3
08	A.V	21	58.3	21	58.3	29	60.4	71	59.1
09	J.P	24	66.6	27	75	27	56.2	78	65
<b>10</b>	<b>K.P</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>86.1</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>94.4</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>60.4</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>78.3</b>
11	P.L.J	24	66.6	35	97.2	24	50	83	69.1
12	A.M	19	52.7	32	88.8	24	50	75	62.5
13	R.A	21	58.3	25	69.4	31	64.5	77	64.1
<b>14</b>	<b>R.E</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>83.3</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>94.4</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>75.8</b>
15	M.K	22	61.1	30	83.3	22	45.8	79	65.8
Overall			71.06		80.69		59.27		69.48

The Self-Reflection and Insight Scale has 3 sub scales - Engagement in Self-Reflection, Need for Self-Reflection and Insight. The scale is subjected to fifteen prospective teachers and their ratings were scored. The data was analyzed and tabulated in the above table. The result presents that the 69.48% of prospective teachers are able to do self-reflection about their own behaviour, thoughts and beliefs and the subscales overall percentage state that 80% of prospective teachers need self-reflection even though 71% of them engage in self-reflection and 59% get insight from self-reflection.

A Set of questions were devised prior to the discussion and the focused group discussion session were conducted and the insights of the prospective teachers were analyzed based on the 'Onion model' a variant of the so-called Bateson model for level of reflection which can influence the way a teacher can function (Dilts 1990, and Korthagen 2004) in order to extract the opinions, beliefs, attitude of the samples towards the phenomenon of interest that is Self-Reflection. Discussions were recorded with the consent of the samples for the purpose of interpretation. Mediation of the interview were handled with utmost care.

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*Figure 1 is the graphical representation of 'Onion Model' describing different levels on which reflection can take place*



The following part summarizes the discussion of the prospective teachers. The fifteen samples were represented as **S1, S2, S3** ---- **S15** and their views on self-reflection was given below. The focused group discussion targeted the opinion about self-reflection while initiating the discussion.

The group of prospective teachers thought that the self-reflection brings self-understanding about their thoughts, behaviour, attitude and beliefs.

*“I can set myself a better only through knowing what I am doing, Self-Reflection set track for that process” - S10. “Simply described it as basic for every human”- S6. “To develop myself as a role model for the society self- reflection helps” -S14, S12.*

They felt that the self-reflection is a driving force to act upon their holistic development.

*“Self-Reflection benefits for the personal growth” - S1. It helps in identifying positive and negative thoughts and provide insights to personal and professional growth - S3, S13.*

Self-reflection let them to develop day by day through identifying their own progression and abilities to modify their behaviour, attitudes and beliefs.

*“It helps to have clear thinking and understand oneself to make precise decision in personal life” - S2. “Through self-reflection we can identify our own thoughts”- S7 “helpful in finding the personal limitations that keeps one unable to move further”- S5, S15.*

The regulatory actions to keep oneself effective is activated through self-regulation and for assessing the personal level on task in hand. It also brings insight on the mistakes of their activities.

*When I’m doing a task self-reflection helps to channelize to do it effectively - S4. “It’s a best practice to that keep me on track for better evaluation” - S9. “Mistakes I made in handling a situation can be changed through Self-Reflective actions” - S8. Identifying the strength and weakness of oneself - S11.*

Further, in the process of focused group discussion, their self-reflection about their teaching practice was initiated and their opinion were analyzed based on the Bateson model for level of reflection which can influence the way a teacher can function (Dilts 1990, and Korthagen

2004). The Onion Model lists Environment, Behaviour, Competency, Beliefs, Identity and Mission as stages of self-reflection. The opinions, statements and the thoughts of the participants were analyzed using triangulation method and it is discussed under the stages of Onion Model.

### **1. Environment: Adapting for the Classroom through Self-Reflection**

The workday life of the professional depends on tacit knowing-in-action, Alan Schön (1983). Self-reflection helped the prospective teachers to understand the nature of the students and their individual differences. This helped them to plan and set up inclusive classroom environment for diverse learners. The demands of the children with special needs are entirely different to the general classroom hence, the self-reflection helped them to be mentally prepared to meet the demands of those students and present a constructive environment to them.

*“From the external point of view, it’s bit difficult to remain reflective all the time but somewhat keeping a track of the triggering things from the classroom is what I found from Self-Reflection and it helped me to know the nature of the students”-S6. “Addressing student with Visual Impairment is entirely different from general students, I reflect on my own walking practice inside the class in order to meet their needs in giving lecture in the classroom”-S5 “During my special school practice, I prepared myself through self-reflection like setting myself to be mentally available to get over from some personal inconvenience in dealing with children with special needs and I tried to provide a conducive learning environment to all students”-S7.*

Emotionally Provoking situation might arouse in the classrooms. Effective responsive behaviour as a Special Educator to deal with the behaviour and tantrums of children with special needs in their classroom is adopted through Self-Reflection.

*“Being prepare for any unexpected challenges to happen is what I gain from Self-Reflection it can be the disruptive behaviour of the student or Dispute between students that might provoke my emotions so that I can act as per my reflection”-S9.*

### **2. Behaviour: Preparation of self to deal students with special needs**

Behavioural part is a core thing for an efficient teacher as they know how to and how not to behave in front of the students. Reducing impulsive actions, facilitating ideal interactions are the resultant of knowing their own behaviour from Self-Reflection.

*“Self-Reflective approach makes me to reduce my impulsive behaviour towards the reasonless actions of some special children particularly with Intellectually Disabled Student”-S7. “I used to get irritated by the mal-adaptive behaviour of student with ID, and I tracked myself regarding why I’m experiencing such feeling and reduced it through Self-Reflection, the tracking of myself is simply Re-Checking What happened? and What I did?”-S9.*

Contingency in behaviour adaption to the meet the diverse learners in the classroom can be equipped through Self-Reflection.

*“It is crucial for me to compose myself in a proper behaving mode so to teach student with learning disability; sticking with the pre-planned method won’t work effectively with them,*

*instant reflection of what and how to teach them can be equipped through Self-Reflection”-S12.*

### **3. Competency: Improving ability by Self-Reflection**

A professional practitioner is a specialist who encounters certain types of situations again and again, Alan Schön (1983). Through repetitions from practice one can achieve the competency to evolve as an effective teacher, self-reflection as a mental instrument supports in the way to account their own abilities.

*“Teaching practice is where our abilities and skills are tested as a prospective teacher, I use Self-Reflection for listing out the setbacks that I’m facing”-S4. “Focusing on how capable I’m to deal with children with special need is obtained through self-reflection only, the transition of attitude towards them was clear through my self-reflection”-S6. “Lack of abilities, Over-Confidence, False Knowledge and opinion towards children with special needs are what I identified from my self-reflection it directly helped me to overcome them”-S9.*

### **4. Belief: Beliefs and their dynamic**

A teacher’s rational and irrational beliefs might influence in their teaching as well as conducting practice.

*“As a prospective teacher extreme self-expectations and beliefs to meet with the professional fit will be existing, in such moment reflecting oneself makes it clear to re-assure what is reality is” S9. “Some social stigmatization on children with special needs were existing and undoubtedly it remains in me too through reflective measures I become aware of those stigmas I had in myself once” S7.*

### **5. Identity: What I Am**

Actualizing who I am and what I am capable of in my profession is a higher order thinking to promote better which can be derived from reflecting oneself.

*“Making myself identify as special teacher and to be justifying for what I have to do” S9. “I believe myself is how I’m behaving; Ultimately organizing my entire behaving patterns according to the classroom when I’m dealing with children with special needs is came out of my self-reflection” S7. “More than just an action it creates a vibrance in self-presentation by reflecting on our own” S4.*

### **6. Mission: Sticking with the plan for betterment**

Excellence is striving to achieve betterment day by day. Sticking with the process to produce appropriate teaching practice and refining it for a period of time can be acquired through Self-Reflection.

*“It’s easier for myself to be better day by day through self-reflection particularly in my specialization teaching i.e. Visual Impairment” S2. “Promoting personal habitual teaching practice onto an effective one by reflecting myself keeps the game goes on and it excite much to do more” S1.*

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In the final part of the focused group discussion, need for Self-Reflection training was taken into discussion, participants showed positive sign for that.

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*“Self-Reflection for me is merely unaided practice of analyzing myself, it would be helpful if it is trained duly” S13. “It’s necessary to carry out self-reflection in a systematic way in order to get rid of negative aspects like rumination, self-judgement and all” S5. “Self-Reflection training will be exciting to access the real potential of oneself” S1.*

A systematic self-reflection training is necessary to overcome some negative resultant of it like rumination, self-judgement, etc.

### SUMMARY

All the participants of the discussion had positive attitude towards Self-Reflection. All the opinions of the participants showed the benefits and importance of self-reflection for a special educator in order to be an effective in their teaching profession. Effective handling & teaching of the children with special need is what the excellence in the Special Education profession and it can be achieved through Self-Reflection Practice. From interpreting their opinions and experience it is clear that the participants of the study were not so systematic in their self-reflection, all the above expressed were purely what they doing over the period as a reflective practice. It is found that proper and systematic training to practice self-reflection is highly needed. Training can be individual as well as grouped. Self-Reflection practices for teachers like Journaling, Peer Observation, Feedback can be introduced to them for training.

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### Conflict of Interest

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