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The influence of practicum supervisors’ facilitation styles on student teachers’ reflective thinking during collective reflection

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ABSTRACT

Student teachers’ reflective thinking is closely associated with learning and improving practice. Novice student teachers require adequate support to reflect more deeply. The role of ‘others’ in collective reflection and knowledge generation as an outcome creates a platform for deep reflection, addressing both the processes and premises of reflective thinking. Facilitation styles of practicum supervisors could influence the level of student teachers’ reflective thinking during collective reflection. This is a case study using purposeful sampling involving a Malaysian teacher training institution that conducted an undergraduate early childhood programme in collaboration with a UK university. Sources of evidence were interviews, direct observations and documents. Data collected were analysed using both inductive and deductive methods. It was found that facilitation styles influence the depth of student teachers’ reflective thinking during group dialogic reflection. A continuum of facilitation styles from collaborative to instructive typologies was constructed. The implications of these findings are discussed.

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Facilitation styles; group dialogic reflection; early childhood practicum; practicum supervisors and collective reflection

Introduction

Research indicates that developing reflection skills influences teacher development and improves student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dewey, 1910; Hayden, Moore-Russo, & Marino, 2013; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Loughran, 1999; Schöen, 1983; Zeichner, 1987). Reflection is seen as a key skill enabling early childhood practitioners to continuously seek improvement, evaluate the effectiveness of early childhood programmes, and examine classroom practices, which otherwise can become a mechanistic process day in and day out (Kuh, 2012; Nolan & Sim, 2011; Miller & Cable, 2011; Raban et al., 2007). How well student teachers are trained in their reflection skills determines the extent to which early childhood practices could be transformed at the workplace for quality practices (Miller & Cable, 2011).

The early childhood classroom, in particular, is unique in that many differing Western theories, approaches and methods of teaching young children are practised. For instance,
High Scope, Froebel, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Waldorf, just to name a few. In the Malaysian context, ways of thinking about classrooms, teachers’ actions, knowledge and preparation will need to be re-constructed to be relevant (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). Otherwise, student teachers may face difficulty integrating theories into practice as they are expected to perform practices drawn from different theoretical perspectives and theories of learning and teaching. This could leave the teachers feeling confused, dejected and isolated in their attempt to put theory into practice.

Furthermore, student teachers who are novices with limited experience in the care and education of young children may not be capable of critical or deep reflection without adequate support (Finlay, 2008; Korthagen et al., 2006; Larrivee, 2006; Nolan, 2008). The nature of reflection demands emotional engagement in examining and questioning personal beliefs and values; stepping outside of your own comfort zone; extra time spent in the process, and so forth (Etscheidt, Curran, & Sawyer, 2012; Finlay, 2008; Gibson & Purdy, 2012). Student teachers are expected to shift from a self-focus to children and others in transitioning from student teachers to classroom teachers, both as a process of learning toward the end of their practicum and an outcome of reflection (Toom, Husu, & Patrikainen, 2014; Ward & McCotter, 2004). And yet, many students still struggle with reflective writing and its interpretations (Toom et al., 2014). Teacher training programmes need to support the reflective thinking of early childhood student teachers by offering a pedagogical approach which provides opportunities to reflect more deeply during their pre-service practicum.

This article comes from a larger PhD study that explored the processes involved in group dialogic reflection (GDR) as a pedagogical approach during the pre-service early childhood practicum. The focus of this article is on the role of the supervisor in enhancing student teachers’ reflection on practice during group dialogic reflection sessions. The data analysis is guided by the research question: How does the facilitation process in group dialogic reflection support student teachers reflective thinking and practice?

Exploring the literature

A review of recent literature points to a shift from individual reflection to collective reflection affected by trends in professional practice characterised by a collective rather than individual focus; multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary practices; as well as an increasing emphasis on co-production in practice (Boud, 2010; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Cresssey & Boud, 2006; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hu, 2004; Ohlsson, 2013; Rantatalo & Karp, 2016). As suggested by social constructivism theory, learning occurs within a social process in which context and conditions are influential (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981). Reality is seen as deeply influenced by life experiences around the learners.

The role of ‘others’ in collective reflection and knowledge generation as an outcome creates a platform for deep reflection, addressing both the processes and premises of reflective thinking (Collin & Karsenti, 2011; Ohlsson, 2013; Rantatalo & Karp, 2016). The social dimension of reflective practice requires research attention, as situated within the early childhood community (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Collin & Karsenti, 2011; Husu, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Reiman, 1999; Toom et al., 2014). Student teachers, if given the appropriate support from the social environment, provide the semiotic mediation through facilitators of collective reflection (Vygotsky, 1978) who turn their practicum experience to deeper reflective outcomes in the process.
In addition, supervisors who are academics and practitioners engaging in collective reflection help student teachers link theory to practice (Allen & Wright, 2014; Stenberg, Rajala, & Hilppa, 2016). Since people from different settings and positions bring with them different orientations, knowledge of educational systems, expectations, priorities and their own learning interests, the facilitation process during collective reflection validates each other’s understandings through testing of ideas and interpretations of the problems identified (Rantatalo & Karp, 2016; Toom et al., 2014). Contrasting ideas, if they occur, result in ‘productive tension’ where transcendent learning takes place. Hence, the original concept used to interpret a situation can be modified and expanded (Mezirow, 1990, p. 369). In the process, participants benefit from a deep learning cycle in this collective learning experience (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), or a collective reflection loop that is double loop in nature. This involves subjecting basic assumptions, ideas or policies to confrontation, scrutiny and validation, leading to a shift in ideas and collective learning (Ohlsson, 2013).

However, research studies have found that student teachers’ reflective thinking could be influenced by the role of facilitators and the social climate developed in the supervisory relationship (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Stegman, 2007). Palomo, Beinart, and Cooper’s (2010) study on supervisory relationships with 284 British trainee clinical psychologists indicates that a facilitative relationship requires supervisors to provide a safe base, be committed and provide a structure to support supervision sessions. Trainees need to feel safe as they open up their thinking and emotions to scrutiny by others. Facilitative conditions in a supervisor–supervisee relationship helps to enhance learning through reflections, formative feedback and action plans (Palomo et al., 2010).

Johnston and Milne (2012) suggested a developmental model of supervision by university supervisors of final year doctoral students in clinical psychology. The two typologies identified were collaborative and didactic quadrants. The collaborative quadrant involves a more complex reflection process where there is joint discovery. In the didactic quadrant, when supervision is led by the supervisor, the trainee lacks the ability to self-reflect without scaffolding, and reflections are procedural, less complex, and task focused.

A small number of research studies have concentrated on using collective reflection as a tool for improving practice within the community of early childhood education in the West (Noble, 2007; Nolan, 2008; Nolan & Sim, 2011; Ortlipp, 2003; Raban et al., 2007). Very few studies have focused on the role of the facilitator in collective reflection, particularly in the Asian context. This study aims to fill the gap in practice, knowledge and empirical studies in collective reflection in early childhood practicum, since reflective practice is a critical skill in ensuring quality early childhood programmes.

**Research methodology**

This is a qualitative case study based on an embedded single case design (Yin, 2009). Case study offers rich information from the in-depth study into the topic under investigation (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). A teacher training institution in Selangor, Malaysia, was selected as the case. It is one of the leading institutions in providing early childhood education teacher training programmes in Malaysia. The three-year undergraduate early childhood teacher training programme in the study is conducted in collaboration with an established university in the United Kingdom. Group dialogic reflection is part of its
practicum requirement in this pre-service bachelor’s degree programme in early childhood education.

Group dialogic reflection, referring to the three-way dialogue in this case study, is conducted at the kindergartens providing preschool education to children aged four to six years. This is when the student teacher, placement mentor and the college supervisor meet as a triadic group to engage in reflective dialogues on the practicum experience. Three placement centres were involved in this study, namely Kindergarten 1, Kindergarten 2 and Kindergarten 3. The placement mentor is assigned by the placement centre, and is usually an experienced staff member. The college supervisor is a lecturer assigned by the teacher training institution as the practicum supervisor who also acts as tutor for the student teachers. All participants are required to complete the three-way dialogue form after each meeting. The dialogue sessions occur at least two to three times during the practicum placement over two semesters, usually during the middle and concluding stages of the placement. The two semesters focused on in this study spanned across March to December 2014 where student teachers were placed three days a week at the placement centres.

The rationale of the research methodology and the direction for data analysis were based on the constructivist interpretive paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2013; Silverman, 2011). The researcher believes that participants’ prior experience and knowledge influence the interpretation or construction of the particular context. Knowledge about the study was created by interactions with participants; and existed only in the space and context in which it was generated (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The products of individual or shared sense-making efforts are the lived experiences of the participants (student teachers, placement mentors and college supervisors) involved in group dialogic reflection and were socially constructed (Firestone, 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). Hence, an interpretive constructivism approach allows reading of the mind and meaning-making, as well as sense-making of the knowers (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The study was conducted according to the ethical research guidelines of the university where the first named researcher was undertaking a PhD, with ethics approval obtained from the research committee. Institutional approvals were received from the teacher training institution, including the collaborating UK university; and participating kindergartens. Signed consent forms were received from all participants prior to the research taking place. Participants’ names were replaced by pseudonyms, and they were aware of their rights to withdraw consent at any time. Member checking of the transcripts and the emerging codes involving the research participants was also part of the methodology.

Participants

Four student teachers, four placement mentors and three college supervisors were involved as participants in this study. Student teachers were selected from the April 2014 Year One cohort of the Bachelor of Early Years Education in consultation with the programme coordinator at the college. Student teacher selection was based on the ability to reflect on their personal teaching philosophy that was later categorised from those requiring assistance to those who appeared more competent.

Each student teacher (ST) was part of a triad that included a placement mentor (M) and college supervisor (SV) who facilitates the three-way dialogues. For reasons of confidentiality, student teachers were given pseudonyms – ST1, ST2, ST3 and ST4. All were female, aged 19
to 21 years, and studying in the second semester of the first year of the course. At the time of selection they were undergoing their second practicum experience after having successfully completed their first practicum in Year One, Semester One.

The placement mentors were all females (M1, M2, M3 and M4) aged between 32 and 45. They had previous experience working in kindergartens ranging from 7 to 14 years. The college supervisors were also all females, aged in their 40s, having 2 to 8 years of experience of teaching in early childhood, and teacher training experience between 5 and 13 years. Demographics of the 11 research participants are presented in Table 1.

**Data collection**

Data collection was carried out over 20 months from April 2014 to December 2015. In order to find out how three-way dialogue was facilitated, observations were conducted at the three kindergartens where the group dialogic reflection sessions were held during the student teachers’ second block of practicum. The observations were audio- and video recorded and transcribed verbatim. Documents collected included 547 pages of student teachers’ practicum portfolios consisting of descriptive reports about the placement centre, lesson plans, evidence of three-way dialogue conducted, practicum forms and reports required by the course; verbatim transcripts of two audio recordings of the meetings with the programme leader from the UK; as well as field notes and a researcher’s journal of expanded field notes and reflections on the study.

After observations of the three-way dialogue sessions were conducted, and data transcribed, individual semi-structured interviews with the researcher that were audio- and video

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo-nym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year/semester</th>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
<th>College teaching experience</th>
<th>Age group of children taught</th>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ST1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Y1S2</td>
<td>½ year</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5–6</td>
<td>Pursuing bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Y1S2</td>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pursuing bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Y1S2</td>
<td>½ year</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pursuing bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Y1S2</td>
<td>½ year</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pursuing bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4–6</td>
<td>Diploma in Montessori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4–6</td>
<td>Diploma in Montessori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2–6</td>
<td>BA in Accounting, Diploma in Montessori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2–6</td>
<td>BA in information technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2–6</td>
<td>MEd, diploma in Montessori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV2*</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2–12</td>
<td>M Ed, B Ed (teaching English as second language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2–6</td>
<td>MA, BA, diploma in Montessori</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
recorded were conducted with all of the 11 participants to gain a deeper understanding on the opportunities for reflective thinking during practicum, as well as the facilitation of deep reflection. Interview data were transcribed verbatim, and member checks were also conducted with all participants to ensure accuracy of recorded data.

All the participants (N = 11) were directly involved in group dialogic reflection that usually begins with discussion on the observation made by the supervisor right before the session starts. The dialogue, which takes about an hour, focuses on student teachers’ progress; issues and concerns; areas of improvement in student teacher’s practice; and discussion on the core skills for early year professionals. Another tool used during three-way dialogue is the professional standard assessment form as a basis for discussions on the required core skills for early childhood professionals, such as meeting the developmental needs of young children, working with parents, inclusive practices, and communication skills.

**Data analysis**

To answer the research question, a hybrid method of inductive and deductive data thematic analysis methods were used to analyse the facilitation styles during three-way dialogues. Line by line reading of the transcribed data and analytic memos and codes were developed from the data in the first triad. Later, the same method was applied in analysing the rest of the triads. Further analysis on the codes assigned to the data-set led to themes and categories being identified (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Subsequently, an explanatory effects matrix (Patton, 1990) was used to compare the themes from the four triads, drawing similarities and differences among them. Triangulation of data was achieved by comparing various sources of evidence, as well as analysing the data through an analytic framework involving theories in reflective practice and social constructivism to enhance the accuracy, comprehensiveness, and objectivity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Patton, 1999; Silverman, 2011).

The framework of reflective thinking (Boud et al., 1985; Husu et al., 2006; Toom et al., 2014) was used as a form of deductive data analysis method to determine the level of reflective thinking as shown in Table 2.

The facilitator role was analysed using the inductive data analysis method. Data collected were analysed and entered into the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO version 11 for a systematic analysis of the codes, themes and categories.

**Findings**

**Typologies for facilitation styles during group dialogic reflection**

Data related to facilitation by the mentors and supervisors during group dialogic reflection were analysed. For a better understanding of their roles, typologies were used to classify categories that divide facilitation styles into parts along a continuum built on illustrative end points attributed with specific characteristics (Patton, 2002). The following section discusses the two typologies developed from the data found in this study: collaborative and instructive.
### Table 2. Framework for levels of reflective thinking (Boud, 2010; Boud et al., 1985; Husu, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2006; Toom, Husu, & Patrikainen, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of reflective thinking</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1: returning to experience</td>
<td>Consiously going back to the event that has happened using description of the actual event, with self or others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2: returning to experience: attending to feelings</td>
<td>Recognising the importance of feelings in facilitating or obstructing the learning experience since feelings and emotions could become either a source of learning or a barrier to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3: association</td>
<td>Relating new information to what is already known by connecting ideas and feelings from the experience to existing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4: integration</td>
<td>Identifying any patterns and relationships among the data, or between the data involving new experience and previous experiences resulting in the formation of new insight through reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5: validation</td>
<td>Testing and verifying the proposed synthesis for (internal) consistency. It allows the student teacher to determine the authenticity of the ideas and feelings. Learners mentally rehearsing their ideas, or simply discussing them with someone those opinion the student teachers trusts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6: appropriation</td>
<td>Apply self-awareness and daily approach towards work, leading to changes in outcomes in behaviour (action outcomes) or affective state (Affective outcomes) as well as in perspectives (perspective outcomes). They will try out new concepts or strategies after reflection, if successful, will become part of their natural behaviour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collaborative
The data indicate that a collaborative facilitator asks questions to solicit information, promotes deeper reflective thinking, and generates ideas without necessarily imposing a certain way of doing things. Depending on how the supervisor and mentor facilitate the three-way dialogue, two types of collaborative characteristics, collaborator and coach, are constructed as follows:

Collaborator. A collaborator works collaboratively with the student teachers, uses active listening skills, and provides appropriate access and support within the context of the learning experience. A collaborator asks open-ended Socratic questions to advance student teachers’ reflective thinking process without necessarily imposing his or her ways. The Socratic questioning method allows the supervisor to deeply probe student’s thinking and helps distinguish what is known or understood through carefully constructed questions. The following excerpt shows how SV1 asked a Socratic type of question to probe the student teacher to clarify her thinking on a lesson recently conducted, as highlighted in italics.

(1) SV1: Just now you had a lesson, art and craft lesson, what was the objective?
(2) The lesson...What was your objective?
(3) ST1: Uh...Because next week they are going to celebrate the Children’s day.
(4) So, I do it today. Actually uh... the other classes they did it before. They did
(5) earlier, then my children are very curious, they asked me how to do it. But the
(6) other class they prepare everything, they cut everything, the children just paste.
(7) I want my children do something challenging, I want them to cut themselves,
(8) to cut the paper. So, I didn't want to prepare anything but today I didn't prepare
materials enough (Continue).
(9) SV1: Did it lead to the lesson objective? To what extent?
(10) ST1: Uh…the lesson objective. Overall is Ok for me, but there is just
(11) something That went out of control.
(12) SV1: Such as what?
(13) ST1: I can't control the whole group. Some of them call me, come here, and I
(14) cannot go around... But my learning of the day is they can create the party hat
(15) using their creativity... also uh I saw some of the children... they, they cut the
(16) paper according uh...according to what they want and then they draw what
(17) they want (OBS/ST1:L1–6).

A study by Johnston and Milne (2012) also found that skilful use of Socratic dialogue has a guiding or eliciting tone. Socratic dialogues are more collaborative when there is a good rapport in the relationship, when the facilitator can easily respond according to student needs (Bolton, 2014; Johnston & Milne, 2012).

Active listening skills help the supervisor to understand and open the minds of student teachers to think, to brainstorm solutions to problems, not make assumptions nor offer any solutions in particular (Johnston & Milne, 2012; Lord, Atkinson, & Mitchell, 2008; Masson, Jacobs, Harvil, & Schimmel, 2012). It is about respecting student teachers’ ideas and allowing them to show what they know, and developing their confidence and capacity along the way (Mezirow, 1990).
Studies by Gladding (2012) and Masson et al. (2012) also found similar characteristics of collaborative facilitators that attend to verbal and non-verbal communication without passing judgment or evaluation; and encourage students to open up during the dialogue.

In summary, a collaborative facilitator sees the relationship between the supervisor and the student teacher as a reciprocal one (Schon, 1987), as referred to as a reciprocally reflective dialogue (p. 40). Collaborative dialogue is inquiry-oriented, preparing student teachers to take an inquiry stance (Nelson & Sadler, 2013; Pultorak & Educators, 2010). They perceive the practicum as ‘we are all in the same boat, let’s work it out’.

**Coach.** A coach links, affirms, encourages, and sets goals for the student teachers during group dialogic reflection. More importantly, the coach is able to help in establishing common ground and further reflection to tease out the theoretical implications of the practice, as suggested by the programme leader in the following excerpt:

*Having that dialogue really gets them to think about what they’re going to do. (pause) And it brings learning and practice together. So it’s actually making those connections in between the theoretical things (pause) and the practice because they are often in isolation (pause)* (INT/PL:L1-2).

For instance, SV2 gives feedback to ST2 on a literacy lesson on adjectives observed as follows:

*You see the first session especially the first 10 minutes right ... they have to look, they have no idea what it is. So let’s say for an example if you were to use story, say in a story there is this fat cat and the fat cat is yellow, then you see, based on the story there is connection to what you are going to teach. Don’t you think is more fun?* (OBS/ST2:L18)

A coach sets a target, and when the trainee achieves the set target, the coach affirms the work and gives suggestions for improvement during reflective dialogues. The following excerpts are from SV1 and M1 about ST1 during the three-way dialogue session:

*SV1: Ok. At least you allowed them some flexibility? You allow them some room to express their... like you said their creativity (OBS/ST1:L10)*

*M1: She was rather responsive to the children ... Ya, she actually responded, listened to every one of them ... Confidence level has increased. And she seems to trust her children. She also gave some encouragement to the children ... She said ‘thank you’ as well, that’s been a good role model (OBS/ST1:L57).*

Affirmation, motivation and encouragement are useful strategies to affirm and celebrate successes of student teachers. Lack of feedback makes the student teacher feel anxious, while support and encouragement reduces anxiety and discomfort of being among more senior members such as mentor and supervisor in a group (Gladding, 2012; Masson et al., 2012).

A facilitator who acts as a coach focuses on training the trainee, and ensuring that tasks are well performed. Coaching focuses on improving specific areas of job performance and outcomes (Lord et al., 2008). For student teachers at the initial stage of describing the experience (Boud et al’s stages of reflection – Level 1: returning to experience), the coach can help the trainee to describe objectively what has happened in the experience, and ask for a detailed account of the event, drawing out episodes that may have gone unnoticed or been misinterpreted. Learners can also be encouraged to be aware of their own feelings and emotions related to the event (Boud et al., 1985; Lord et al., 2008).
Having someone to point out issues about practice brings about awareness of the unconscious habits and behaviours that could potentially result in fuller consciousness and changes in perspectives (Gornall & Burn, 2013). However, people often come with different ideas and perceptions on how they wish to fulfil the targets, or have different priorities. Having a target set for them and not with them could invite defensive feelings. It is worthwhile to work out mutually agreeable targets (Pehrson, Panos, Larson, & Cox, 2009).

The most significant contribution of a facilitator is to give what Rogers (1961, in Boud et al., 1985, p. 37) refers to as ‘unconditional positive regard’; that is, to give ‘free and undivided attention’ to the learner, drawing their attention to their behaviour, or provide access to other helpful resources. Gornall and Burn (2013) link coaching to learning, where a coachee is accompanied through darkness in the forest to the light of learning, and helped to draw on their inner resources to set forth their own journey in the future. The word ‘accompany’ has painted the picture of the coaching role (p. 17) that helps student teachers to reflect and develop inner qualities that are required to navigate through the challenges at the placement centre.

In summary, a collaborative facilitator taps into the expressions of teaching that are explicit and personal in terms of knowledge, and skills implicit from the teacher, but observable by other people. A collaborative process could bring these expressions out to be co-constructed to inform practice. Reflection, however, requires strategically constructed mediation or facilitation (Larrivee, 2006, p. 24) through which collaborative facilitators provide scaffolding to help learners construct a deeper understanding (Johnston & Milne, 2012), and become engaged and motivated to learn more.

Instructive

Data from this study suggest that an instructive style of facilitation characterises giving of instructions and conveying information to recipients. Instructive facilitators use closed questions that are easy and quick to answer, requiring only short responses, to keep control of the dialogue, follow the sign posts that guide conversations toward certain fixed instructional targets, and conduct feedback and evaluation based on those targets. The facilitation style affects the types of instructive facilitators, navigator and master, as follows:

**Navigator.** Findings from this study indicate that a navigator characterises asking closed questions to keep control of the dialogue, formulates the goals and outcomes, identifies a variety of solutions to problems, and leaves the student teacher to choose the options to pursue the set goals. A navigator has an exact direction in mind, and gives precise instruction to get to the destination in the shortest time and most efficient way.

For instance, SV2 was actively asking specific questions, seeking confirmation, clarification and information on ST3’s progress, her teaching and lesson planning, as well as her skills as an early childhood professional, as required by the course (OB/ST3:L2-16).

Closed questions were used as opening questions by the supervisor during the three-way dialogue. They were easy to answer questions to acquire specific information without requiring in-depth responses as follows:

- So far she’s been here for some months, how is her progress? (OB/ST3:L2)
- Does she get a chance to teach every time she comes in, or more to just assisting? (OB/ST3:L6)
SV2 persistently asked about opportunities for lesson planning during the student teacher’s practicum. She was keen to achieve closure of a persuasion, seeking the required response, as shown by the three following excerpts:

But is this possible say, for instance, you know, uh based, I mean, I mean still, you know, fulfil the requirement of what you need in school, but can she at the same time, can she improvise, you know, still plan a lesson. (OB/ST3:L19)

As ST2’s responses were brief, SV2 also attempted to probe further for more information regarding her understanding of the children being taught, or the workplace practices. For instance,

She [referring to a child] still cannot concentrate? (OB/ST3:L70)

You mean after class, the child is left out and couldn’t catch up, you will go through with the child the same subject. Do you change the way of teaching, teaching the child, or still using the same method? (OB/ST3:L159)

Very specific questions were asked to assess ST3’s understanding of the early years skills standards as required by the course as follows:

Able to select resources suitable to meet the needs and interest of the children? (OB/ST3: L176)

So you are okay there … skills that support transition. Do you know what transition is? (OB/ST3:L187)

Keeping on track was very important for the navigator. Questions relate to sign posts along the way that are to be followed faithfully. Very specific questions were asked about the experience so that a detailed account of the analysis and interpretations will be completed or validated.

As Schon (1987) reasons, for learning, trainee teachers require direct instruction and opportunities for reflection. Problems generated at the placement provide for immediate scaffolding relevant to student teachers, where feedback, evaluation and modelling of the reflective process or practice can occur (Jones & Jones, 2013). Rigorous feedback and evaluation are given to ensure quality of the work produced (Etscheidt et al., 2012; Wenger, 1998). However, tight navigation is less useful for advancing reflective thinking and exploring new ideas. Autonomy and independent decision-making skills are necessary for novice teachers to exercise their reflective-thinking and problem-solving skills (Hayden, Moore-russo, & Marino, 2013; Roskos-Vukelich & Risko, 2001).

**Master.** An apprentice usually learns the skills on the job by following a master who is an expert in the field. Tasks are broken into smaller and identifiable units during reflection-on-action (Schon, 1987), and the student teacher just follows what is instructed step by step. For instance, in order for ST3 to have more opportunities to communicate with parents, SV2 suggested that ST3 should take advantage of the events held at the kindergarten to maximise her opportunities for learning by attending parent–teacher meetings, as shown in the following excerpt:

Observe how the senior teacher or the principal talks to the parents so that they can pick up from there. Skills, before they do it themselves. But here you get so much of opportunity so at any time if let’s say you ever encounter this kind of chance, be there, alright. So that you can pick up the skill (OB/ST3:L9).

The master would set a target and the time frame for achieving and the apprentice is expected to follow the technical prescription closely without deviating from it. For instance,
in order to help ST4 improve her teaching skills, SV3 gave her suggestions so that she could conduct lessons more confidently. For instance, starting with a small group, practice in the mirror, keep trying (OBS/ST4:L38–46).

Apprenticeship may be useful for training towards mastery of certain knowledge and skills. However, Schön refers to teaching as a professional artistry. In the early childhood classroom, the practitioner’s ability to think about, and to have a space for co-construction of practice is critical, although there is a place for theory and technique in skilful practice (Scaife, 2010; Schon, 1987). When student teachers do things habitually according to set instructions or technical prescription without feeling, thinking, validating, and adjusting to the practice, they do not do any justice to the children and parents (Hatton & Smith, 1995; LaBoskey, 1994; Thompson & Pascal, 2012; Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). When each step of the way is guided or closely monitored so that the apprentice learns to replicate the work done by his or her master, there are few opportunities to think about practice.

In summary, reflective thinking can also be nurtured through instructive opportunities for students through an embedded dialogue and feedback with mentor and supervisor as observed during group dialogic reflection mentioned in the previous excerpts. Student teachers who are not innately capable of reflection require close supervision and guidance from their supervisors (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Lloyd & LaFramboise, 2005; Stegman, 2007; Wells, 1991).

**Facilitation styles influencing student teachers’ reflective thinking levels**

In this study, it was found that various types of facilitation styles influence the reflective thinking levels and outcomes as demonstrated by the student teachers. For instance, when SV1 played a more collaborative role during group dialogic reflection, the student teacher reflected more deeply on how she adopted a new classroom management strategy, and became a role model for the children (OBS/ST1:L75). There was evidence of student teachers applying self-awareness and a fresh approach towards positive guidance strategies work, leading to changes in outcomes in the behaviour, affective and perspectives domains, as well as a changed set of priorities (Boud et al., 1985). However, when SV2 played a more instructive role, the student teacher did not go further to connect her experience with new ideas that she had learnt and her responses were brief. SV2 took a more instructive role through giving suggestions and providing examples from her observations (OBS/ST3:L178–184).

Similarly, Young and MacPhail’s (2016) study on the relationships between the University and placement centres also demonstrates that more collaborative approaches of supervision through mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire are important features of a learning community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The move from the long-established instructive to collaborative approaches for facilitating reflection found in this study signifies a shift in paradigm, as shown in Figure 1.

In this study, a more collaborative facilitation style results in deeper reflection involving validation or appropriation. A more instructive facilitation style results in more descriptive reflection.
Conclusions

Reflective outcomes of the student teachers can be influenced by the typologies of facilitation styles characterised as collaborative or instructive. This finding opens up a new perspective about reflection and the social constructivist dimension of supervision, unlike the focus on the individual and cognitive aspect of reflection in the past. Unlike earlier research that suggests student teachers lack ability to operate at higher levels of reflective thinking (Gibson & Purdy, 2012; Husu et al., 2006; Nolan & Sim, 2011), this study supports research findings on providing guided reflection and additional support to enhance student teachers’ reflection, which also yielded positive outcomes (Boud, 2010; Boud et al., 1985; Husu et al., 2006; Nolan, 2008; Toom et al., 2014).

Schon (1987) had very early on predicted the need for academic support for enhancing reflective skills of educators for during practicum. There must be ‘first class faculty’ involved, and the facilitator he named as ‘coach, advisor, consultant, tutor’ (Schon, 1987, p. 171). Boud et al. (1985) also indicated that support, encouragement and intervention by others were necessary to help student teachers to learn to reflect. This implies that practicum supervisors play a very critical role in facilitating reflective thinking of student teachers during practicum. An awareness of the types of facilitation style and their characteristics will be useful in selecting and training practicum supervisors. The facilitator behaviour will influence the level of reflective thinking and social climate during the dialogue. This metacognitive awareness of facilitators knowing about themselves and their student teachers in the reflective learning processes is essential for a learning community involving practicum supervisors, mentors and student teachers (Shulman & Shulman, 2004).

A collaborative facilitator engages participants in communications, co-construction and co-creation of knowledge, rather than mere reproduction of knowledge (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). As Freire (1970, in Freire, 2005) has suggested, a collaborative dialogue approach to education leads to critical investigation that generates and expands on new ideas and
solutions. A dialogical supervisor working on those ideas co-constructed with student teachers merely investigates to find out where the problems are, and not to lecture on them (Freire, 2005, p. 109). Through collaborative dialogues, the ideas can be ‘confirmed, modified, or stimulated to deeper levels of understanding’ (Boud, 2010; Johnston & Milne, 2012; Larrivee, 2006, p. 24; Mezirow, 1990). As evident in this study, Socratic dialogues become a valuable exercise involving ‘intellectual conflict’ (Fullan, 1999, in Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. 20) that could result in further clarity, insights and plans of action in a safe environment (Bolton, 2014).

**Implications for future practice and research**

The description of the facilitator’s role as a continuum is a meaningful exercise that allows readers to identify the behaviour and attitudes associated with the typologies. It signifies a paradigm shift in the practicum approach from a traditionally instructive style to a collaborative one that promotes reflective thinking and collaborative learning. Further research can be conducted on how this continuum can be used for professional development of supervisors in order for them to learn about the different facilitation styles and how to provide appropriate scaffolding to different types of learners.

Further, an awareness of the supervisor’s facilitation style could help the supervisors and university or college administration to provide appropriate professional development support to the academic staff. Such support could include programmes on effective facilitation and questioning skills that elicit assumptions rather than mere information and foster an open and democratic group climate that require specific training and professional development.

The same qualitative study can be replicated in different research sites that offer collective reflection processes. A follow-up study could also be conducted to test the facilitation styles conducive for supporting student teachers’ reflective thinking.

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