Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for
a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and
private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without
the permission of the Author.
Psychologists’ Intentional use of Reflection as a Tool for Inquiry

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Massey University

Andrew James Rae

2010
Abstract

A growing body of research indicates that reflective thinking is an important element of professional practice. At the heart of the concept of reflective thinking is the belief that professionals must maintain an open mind to different perspectives in order to challenge their own knowledge, values, beliefs and understandings of any situation they encounter. The present study examined how Ministry of Education, Special Education MOE (SE) psychologists use reflective thinking in their practice, how the use of reflective thinking can be enhanced, the effect of enhancing reflective thinking on practice, and the effect of the psychologist’s reflective thinking on the services they provided to nominated clients. The study was undertaken in two phases.

Phase 1 involved identifying individual and organisational factors that enhanced or restricted reflective thinking by psychologists. This phase involved a literature review and a questionnaire completed by MOE (SE) psychologists. The questionnaire identified the factors that psychologists believed enhanced or restricted their use of reflective thinking.

Phase 2 used an action research approach to examine the effect of providing scaffolding to assist psychologists to engage in reflective thinking, the influence of reflective thinking on their practice, and the
outcomes of their reflective thinking for nominated clients. This phase of the study involved two psychologists working through three cycles of action research and completing weekly reflective journal exercises, based on the Gibbs (1988) model of reflective thinking. Additional data on the psychologists’ reflective thinking processes and their practice were collected through semi-structured interviews with the psychologist, parents/caregivers, and classroom teacher who were involved with a nominated student.

The results of Phase 1 identified the factors that the MOE (SE) psychologists believed enhanced and restricted their reflective thinking processes. A thematic map of the key factors identified as enhancing reflective thinking was developed and the concept of reflective thinking used in the questionnaire was defined as:

An adaptive metacognitive and emotional process, which is facilitated through social dialogue, within the context of multiple environments that support, value, and promote opportunities for reflective thinking.

The results from Phase 2 found that when appropriate scaffolding was put in place to enable opportunities for reflective thinking at the individual, peer, and organisational level, the psychologists’ reflective
thinking could be rapidly enhanced. This was observed within a relatively short timeframe of only twelve weeks.

The study found that through providing opportunities to engage in reflective thinking, psychologists were able to reflect at different levels depending on the situation. In addition, that psychologists’ reflective thinking influenced their future thoughts, actions, beliefs, and emotions, which lead to a more client focused service.
Acknowledgments

The completion of this thesis has been a long and at times difficult journey. Since starting the thesis, I have travelled down many roads, some positive like the birth of our four children: Angus, Keegan, Liam, and Cherish. Others have been painful, like the loss of my nephew Michael in a car crash in 2005. The fact that I have continued on this journey is due to the support and belief of a number of key people.

Thank you to my family for their patience throughout the duration of this project.

Thank you to my supervisors, Professor Ian Evans and Dr. Roseanna Bourke. Their rigorous and detailed feedback helped me to understand the research process and to develop as a writer. Their words of encouragement supported and guided me when the journey was challenging.

Thank you to Mark and Jack, the psychologists who made Phase 2 of this study possible. Your willingness to share your time, thoughts, and beliefs was greatly appreciated.
Thank you to Cathy and Kate for sharing your thoughts and experiences. I wish you both all the best for the future.

Thank you Jo and Rose, for your insights into how psychologists can better support class teachers; this will benefit other children with special needs.

Thank you to my managers and colleagues in The Ministry of Education, Special Education who have supported this Doctorate over many years. Special thanks to Terry O’Brien for his work on developing the electronic portfolio, your support was greatly appreciated.

Thank you to Vicki Vaughan, Lyn Kerr, and Maria Boolieris for their invaluable assistance in proof reading this thesis.

My appreciation and thanks to Massey University College of Education for the financial support provided in 2008, which allowed me to take four weeks leave to focus on writing the thesis. This provided a much-needed boost to the writing process.

Finally, thank you to Michael Neil Jeffries (26th May 1988 – 29th July 2005), one of the most reflective young men I have ever known. I dedicate this thesis to Michael.
Table of Contents

Abstract iii
Acknowledgments vii
Table of Contents ix
List of Figures xiii
List of Tables xiv

Chapter One: Introduction to the Thesis 1
Reflective Thinking and Practitioner Effectiveness 1
New Zealand Registered Psychologists 3
The Ministry of Education, Special Education 7
Focus of the Present Study 8
Significance of the Topic 9
Research Goals 10
Structure of the Thesis 12

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature 15
Reflective Thinking as a Concept 16
Reflective Thinking and Learning 23
Key Theories of Learning Relevant to the Present Study 23
The Reflective Practitioner 30
Practitioner Inquiry as a Feature of Professional Practice 32
Communities of Practice 33
Facilitating Reflective Thinking 34
Evaluating Reflective Thinking 37
Environments that Enhance Reflection 37
Reflective Thinking and Evidence Based Practice 38
Outcomes of Reflective Thinking 40
Risks of Reflective Thinking 41
Summary of the Reviewed Literature 42
### Chapter Three: Philosophical Influences  45
- Epistemology  45
- Methodology  47
- Methodology Phase 1  58
- Methodology Phase 2  52
- Types of Action Research  54
- Insider-Outside Action Research Partnerships  57
- Methods Phase 2  59
- Data Collection Phase 2  60
- Electronic Portfolios and Guided Reflective Journal  62
- Analysis of Data  68
- Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research  70
- Ethical Considerations  75
- Summary  78

### Chapter 4: Setting the Scene  81
- Self-completion Questionnaire  81
- Participant Demographics  82
- Data Analysis  87
- Factors Identified as Enhancing Reflective Thinking  96
- Factors Identified as Restricting Reflective Thinking  108
- Affective Factors that Influence Reflective Thinking  118
- Summary  125
Chapter Five: Theory into Practice

Participants
Overview of the Three Cycles of Action Research
Scaffolding Reflective Thinking
Overview of Phase 2
Action Research Cycle One: Mark
Action Research Cycle One: Jack
Teacher's and Parent's Perceptions of the Psychologist's Practice
Action Research Cycle Two: Mark
Action Research Cycle Two: Jack
Action Research Cycle Three: Mark
Action Research Cycle Three: Jack
Teacher's and Parent's Perceptions of the Psychologist's Practice
Evaluation of Scaffolding in Place to Support Reflective Thinking
Summary

Chapter Six Discussion and Conclusions

Factors that Enhance Reflective Thinking
Factors Identified as Restricting Reflective Thinking
Redefining the Concept of Reflective Thinking
Action Research and Reflective Thinking
Action Research as Scaffolding for Reflective Thinking
Willingness to changing practice based on reflective thinking
Espoused Theories versus Theories In Use
The Researcher as an Outside Researcher and Critical Friend
The Effect of Reflective Thinking on Client Outcomes
Possible Implications of the Findings of the Study
The Role of Professional Learning in Reflective Thinking
Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research
Concluding Comment

References
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information Sheet  
Appendix B: Letter to Massey University Co-ordinator  
Appendix C: Consent Form for Massey University Co-ordinator  
Appendix D: Letter to the National Manager of Special Education  
Appendix E: Consent Form: National Manager Special Education  
Appendix F: Letter to Regional Managers  
Appendix G: Consent Form Regional Managers  
Appendix H: Letter to District Managers  
Appendix I: Consent: Ministry of Education, District Managers  
Appendix J: Letter Ministry of Education, Psychologists  
Appendix K: Psychologists’ Self-completion Questionnaire  
Appendix L: Questionnaire Response Template  
Appendix M: Letter for Ministry of Education, Psychologists  
Appendix N: Registered Psychologist Consent Form  
Appendix O: Letter for Board of Trustees/Principal  
Appendix P: Consent Form for Board of Trustees/Principal  
Appendix Q: Letter for the Classroom Teacher  
Appendix R: Consent Form for the Classroom Teacher  
Appendix S: Letter to Parents/Caregivers of Nominated Student  
Appendix T: Consent Form for Parents/Caregivers  
Appendix U: Letter for the Nominated Student  
Appendix V: Consent Form for Nominated Student  
Appendix W: Self-completion Questionnaire: Research Questions  
Appendix X: Interview Questions (Psychologist)
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1: Experiential Learning Cycle</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2: The Reflective Cycle</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1: Electronic Portfolio Front Page</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.2: Competencies for Educational Psychology (NZ)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.3: Report Section</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.4: Knowledge and Skills for Framing, Measuring and Planning</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.5: Reflective Journal</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1: Psychologist Age Groups by Gender</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2: Identified Specialist Areas</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.3: Theoretical Perspective: Most Influence to Practice</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.4: Years of Practice as a Psychologist</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.5: Factors Identified Enhancing Reflective Thinking</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.6: Factors Identified Restricting Reflective Thinking</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.7: Affective Factors that Influence Reflective Thinking</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.8: Key Factors Enhancing Psychologists’ Reflective Thinking</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.1: Ecological Model of Reflective Thinking</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1 Example of Initial Codes Identified</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2 Initial Codes for Each Section of the Questionnaire</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.1 Demographic Information for Psychologists</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.2 Demographic Information for Identified Cases</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.3 Activities Involved in Each Cycle of Action Research</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.4: Key Themes from Participants’ Initial Interview Questions</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.5: Key Themes from Participants’ Initial Reflective Journal Entries</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>