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**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

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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 (26<sup>th</sup> May 1988 – 29<sup>th</sup> July 2005), one of the most reflective young men I have ever known. I dedicate this thesis to Michael.

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