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Here's Why you should use the Reflective Approach to Teaching Practicum Debriefing (RATPD): Insights into its Usefulness, Benefits, and Challenges from over a decade of research.

Mark Minott

University of Hull, United Kingdom, M.Minott@hull.ac.uk

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Here's Why you should use the Reflective Approach to Teaching Practicum Debriefing (RATPD): Insights into its Usefulness, Benefits, and Challenges from over a decade of research.

Presently, a common occurrence is seeking customers' views on products and services. Recently, I contacted my local bank for a replacement bank card, and within a few days, I got a "we value your feedback" email in my inbox. This essay, which aims to encourage you to use the RATPD, aligns with this phenomenon of eliciting feedback because it uses data which includes the views of students who have engaged with the RATPD research over the last decade.

Several questions guide this essay. What exactly is the RATPD? When, where and how has it been used and What do students say are the Usefulness, Benefits, and Challenges?

1. What exactly is the Reflective Approach to Teaching Practicum Debriefing (RATPD)?

Pulling on several of my works spanning the last decade, the Reflective Approach to Teaching Practicum Debriefing (RATPD) combines elements of reflective teaching—in particular, reflection-on-action—with student teachers' practicum debriefing tutorials.

The theoretical underpinning for the approach is a combination of the idea of reflection-on-action (Schön, 1987) and the idea that reflective teaching and learning must involve not just questioning teaching techniques but also the teacher's goals, values, beliefs, assumptions about teaching and the teaching context (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). The approach encourages student teachers to reflect on their actions and those of the mentor teachers observed during their practicum exercises in schools. The use of questions is a central tenet of the RATPD and the RATPD is enacted through four reflective questions:

1. What have you learned about teaching?
2. To what extent has the observation or teaching episode caused changes in your beliefs, values, and assumptions about teaching?
3. What have you learned about 'self' as a teacher?
4. What change(s) will you make (if any) because of your reflection?

These questions guide discussions during debriefing sessions. I refer to the questions as being reflective because they emerge from my understanding of reflective teaching.

But, more importantly, they help to encourage student teachers to think critically about what they had observed in schools during practicum, their learning and behaviours as potential teachers and changes they might make based on their reflection (Author, 2021).

1.1. Reason you should use the RATPD.

A synthesis of the discussion reveals that the RATPD should be employed in your practice because it has been used and evaluated, is grounded in seminal theories, and encourages student teachers to reflect critically on their practicum experiences and development as future educators.

2. When, where and how has it been used? (Historic Overview)

Between 2011- 2012, I devised and implemented the RATPD at a local university college in Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, with student teachers and a report was published in the USA.

In 2015 the strategy was modified and used with secondary music students in a UK international school, and a report was published. The modification involved using reflective questions 1 to 3 and inserting the secondary school subjects being examined. The questions became:

1. What have you learned from the unit of lessons?
2. How do you feel about composing and performing?
3. What have you learned about “self” as a student, composer, and performer?

In 2019 the RATPD was used as a reflective journal tool to ascertain knowledge gained as a lead examination invigilator(proctor) at a London further education college, also it was applied to master's degree dissertation students at a university in the south of England to encourage deep reflection on learning. Subsequent reports were published. In both situations, the three questions were modified.

In the case of the invigilator (proctor), the participant described several incidents that occurred while leading a team of invigilators overseeing student examinations. After describing each incident, the questions, what was learned about invigilation and what was learned about “self” as an invigilator, were asked and answered.

For the master’s degree dissertation students, the questions were: Based on your recent research and supervision experience, what insights have you learned about research writing and supervision? How have these experiences influenced your beliefs, values, and assumptions concerning these areas? Additionally, what have you learned about yourself as a researcher?

In 2021 the RATPD was used with student teachers from a Russell group, UK University and the result was published. Since these were student teachers, the original reflective questions were employed.

In 2022 the question about the extent to which the RATPD could be incorporated into a long-standing Japanese teaching approach called lesson study (jugyo kenkyu) was answered and the result was published. The RATPD could be easily inserted in the post-lesson discussion while maintaining the collaborative dimension of the colloquia aspect of the jugyo kenkyu.

In 2023 the RATPD was again modified and used to ascertain the degree to which students in a United Kingdom university faculty of education achieved module or course learning outcomes. In this study, the three questions were modified to fit the context and named module:

1. What have you learned about international and comparative education?
2. To what extent has the module(course) caused changes to your beliefs, values, and assumptions about international and comparative education?
3. What have you learned about yourself as a teacher or educator?

In 2024 the RATPD was proved to relate to Assessment as Learning (AaL). It was also shown that by enacting the RATPD, one is engaging in an actual Assessment as Learning activity (Author, 2024).

2.1. Reason you should use the RATPD.

A synthesis of the above discussion reveals that RATPD should be used because it can be employed in various settings and is an Assessment as Learning (AaL) strategy. However, most importantly the reflective questions making up the strategy are flexible and can be manipulated to fit contexts and situations.

3. What do students say are the Usefulness, Benefits, and Challenges?

To answer this final question, I continue to pull on research reports over the years. The reports highlight five ways in which the RATPD can be considered useful, outline several benefits, and identify two challenges.

3.1 RATPD Usefulness

Firstly, it is impossible to answer the reflective questions with simple yes and no responses. To engage them fully requires thoughtful consideration i.e., students must think, thus contributing to their learning (Schon, 1987 & Zeichner and Liston, 1996).

A synthesis of examples of what students reflected on over the years and hence learned about include: Teaching techniques, day-to-day operation of the school and classroom, general school context, positive and negative experiences of teaching, difficulty, rewards and effort required to teach, cognitive, musical, and attitudinal skills developed, mechanics and affective aspects of research writing and dissertation supervision, mechanics and affective/relational aspects of teaching and the need to balance these with reflective aspect of teaching.

Secondly, the RATPD requires students to think affectively, i.e., target their emotions, values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching, learning, a unit of music studied, and research writing and dissertation supervision.

Thirdly, the RATPD requires students to personalise the teaching practicum exercise, examine and disclose personal feelings and subject content deficiencies, internalise a unit of lessons, identify and take ownership of positive attitudes and behaviours as part of their nature, be self-critical and examine and disclose personal feelings about 'self' as a teacher.

Finally, the RATPD, when modified, is a user-friendly, practical, and uncomplicated data collection tool using three reflective questions and is especially useful for busy academics (Scholl and Olsen, 2014).

3.2 RATPD Benefits

The main benefits remain consistent over the years, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and self-awareness in the teaching practicum debriefing process and when applied to other subject areas. It also encourages self-directed critical thinking, where individuals independently engage in the process.

3.3 RATPD Challenges

Over the years, challenges with the RATPD have revolved around student teachers' hesitance in sharing their perceptions, beliefs, and emotions about encountered issues or situations. Also, some may be unwilling to discuss feelings and personal assumptions. The suggested solution involves ensuring confidentiality during debriefing sessions and refraining from recording personal and emotional discussions. Additionally, students are encouraged to review and amend records from their sessions.

4. Summary.

So, why should you use the RATPD? You should do so because:

1. It has been used and evaluated, is grounded in seminal theories, and encourages student teachers to critically reflect on their practicum experiences and development as future educators.
2. It can be employed in various settings and is an Assessment as Learning (AaL) strategy. However, most importantly, the reflective questions making up the strategy are flexible and can be manipulated to fit contexts and situations.
3. It requires thoughtful consideration, i.e., students must think, thus contributing to their learning.
4. It requires students to think affectively, i.e., target their emotions, values, beliefs, and assumptions.
5. It asked students to personalize the teaching practicum exercise or unit of lesson or situations and examine and disclose personal feelings.
6. (When modified), it is a user-friendly, practical, and uncomplicated data-collection tool for busy academics.
7. It encourages critical thinking, self-directed critical thinking, and self-awareness.

5. Conclusion

In addition to the reasons previously discussed, I invite you, the reader, to consider the following points.

Despite the main challenges of the RATPD identified earlier, teacher educators, school-based mentors, and cooperating teachers have an invaluable tool to enable and encourage the reflective capabilities of student teachers. While some educators might already use reflective questions in their practice, the RATPD provides a structured framework to guide debriefing sessions, which are central to the work of teacher educators.

Integrating the RATPD into a teacher education programme can contribute to the hidden curriculum, subtly conveying to student teachers the importance of reflective teaching and their development as reflective practitioners. Jerald (2006) notes, the

hidden curriculum indirectly communicates, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours students learned.

One essential role of teacher educators is to model various aspects of teaching. The Association of Teacher Educators (USA) (2024) highlights that modelling of teaching and ideas for student teachers is the foremost standard for accomplished teacher educators. The RATPD offers a valuable opportunity for teacher educators to demonstrate the reflective questions student teachers should carry into their practice.

8. Reference

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